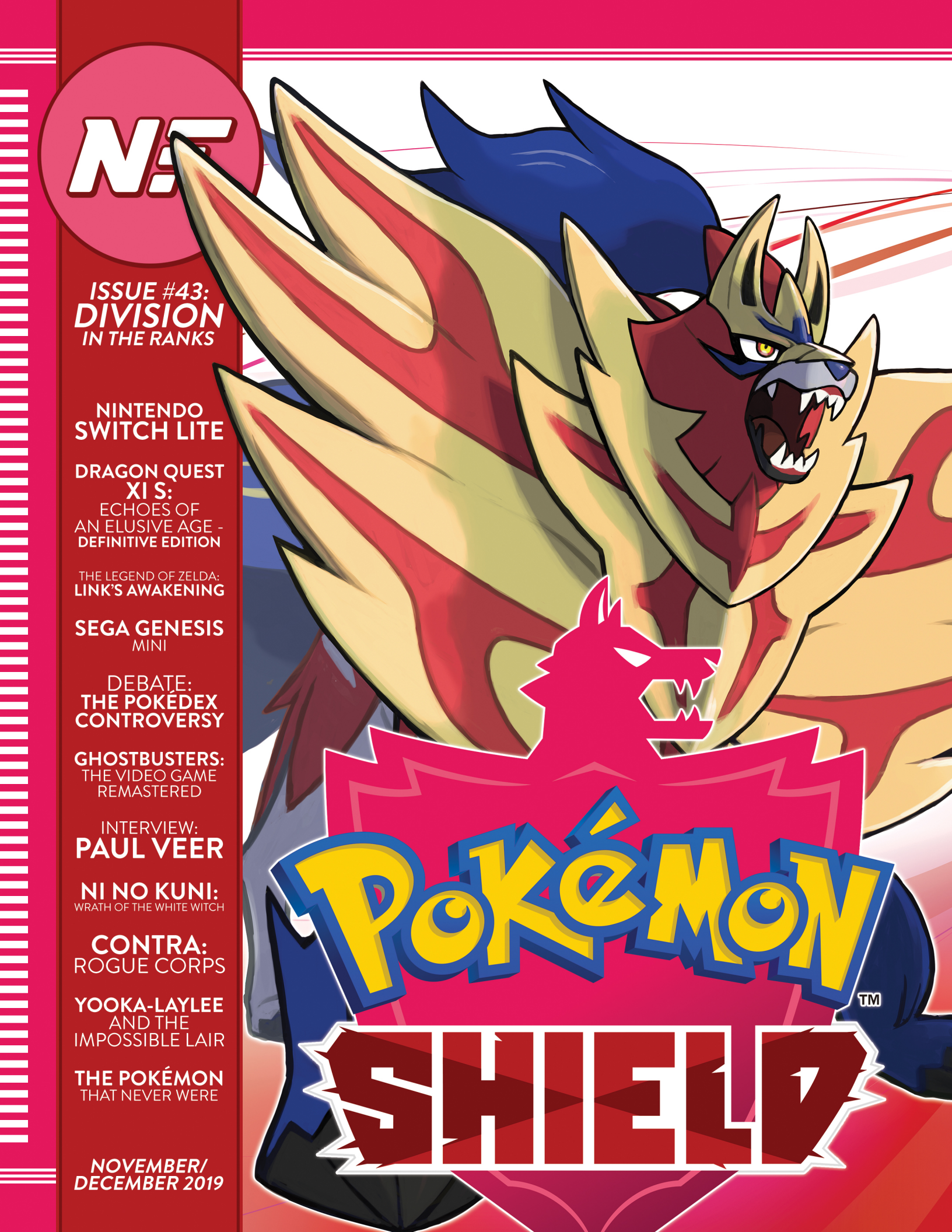




NF

ISSUE #43:
DIVISION
IN THE RANKS

**NINTENDO
SWITCH LITE**

**DRAGON QUEST
XI S:**
ECHOES OF
AN ELUSIVE AGE -
DEFINITIVE EDITION

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA:
LINK'S AWAKENING

**SEGA GENESIS
MINI**

DEBATE:
**THE POKÉDEX
CONTROVERSY**

GHOSTBUSTERS:
THE VIDEO GAME
REMASTERED

INTERVIEW:
PAUL VEER

NI NO KUNI:
WRATH OF THE WHITE WITCH

CONTRA:
ROGUE CORPS

**YOOKA-LAYLEE
AND THE
IMPOSSIBLE LAIR**

**THE POKÉMON
THAT NEVER WERE**

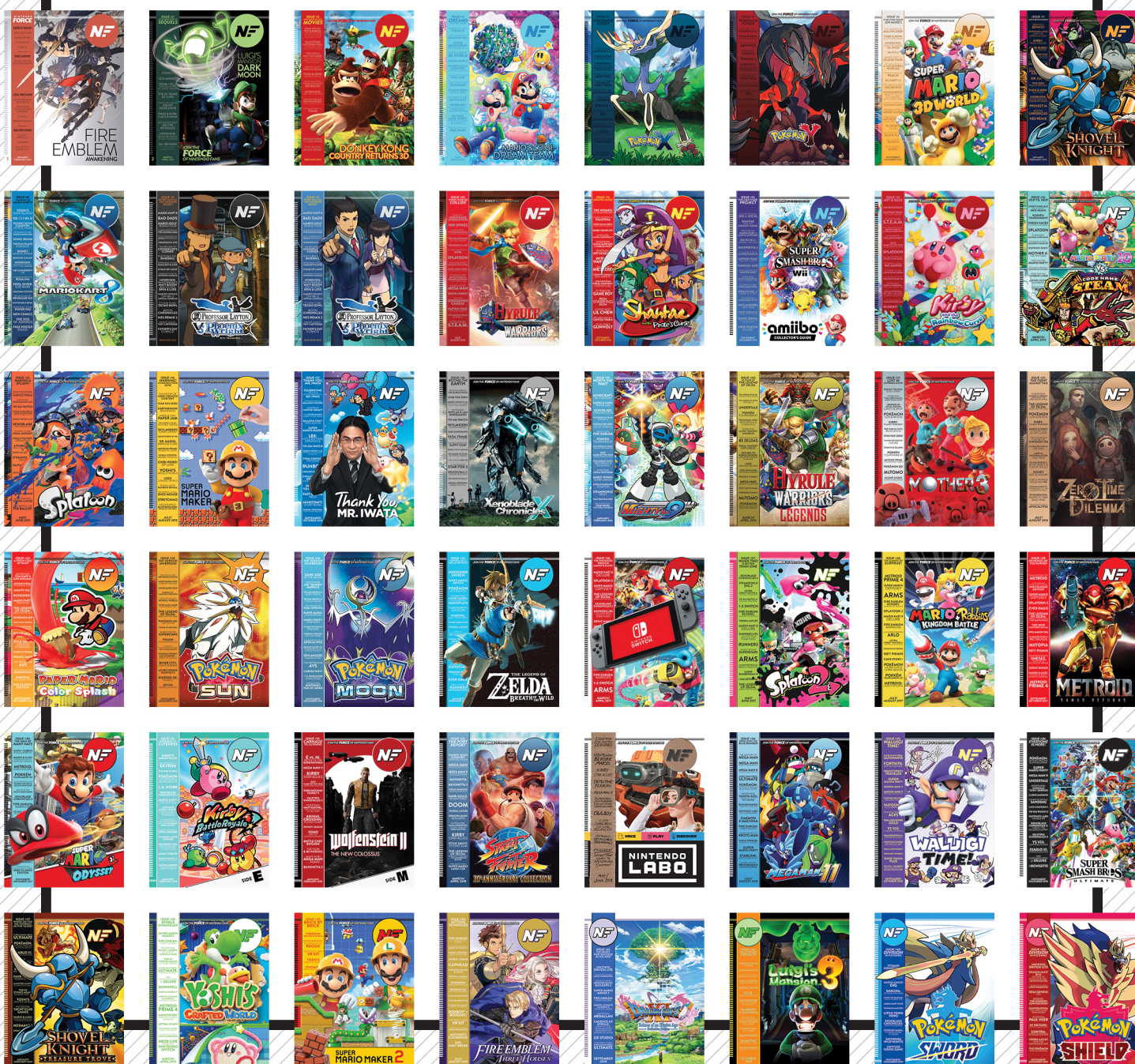
**NOVEMBER/
DECEMBER 2019**

POKÉMON
SHIELD™

SEVEN YEARS COMPLETE!

GAME FREAK'S GOT too many Pokémon to keep track of, and we've almost got too many magazines to manage! Thanks to the continuing support of our thousands of fans – especially those of you who've pledged ongoing support as patrons through [Patreon.com/NintendoForce](https://www.patreon.com/NintendoForce) – we've now hit yet another milestone: seven calendar years in the books! Nintendo Power closed up shop at the end of 2012, but from January 2013 onward we've now kept coverage of Nintendo alive in print magazine form for seven full years.

And we're still going strong! As the calendar flips into 2020 and beyond, expect even more excellent issues to be added to the array of our past publications seen below. And if you missed any of them, visit the website store over at [NFMagazine.com](https://www.NFMagazine.com) to get yourself caught up! New back issue bundles will be available there soon! – LUCAS



**IN THE
WORKS FOR
ISSUE #44:**

**POKÉMON SWORD
& SHIELD**

LUIGI'S MANSION 3

**ANIMAL CROSSING:
NEW HORIZONS**

**MARIO & SONIC
AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES:
TOKYO 2020**

**VITAMIN
CONNECTION**

**DOOM
ETERNAL**

**SHANTAE
AND THE SEVEN SIRENS**

**TOKYO MIRAGE
SESSIONS #FE
ENCORE**

**TERRY BOGARD IN
SUPER SMASH BROS.
ULTIMATE**

**SUPER NINTENDO
WORLD**

**RING FIT
ADVENTURE**

**PERSONA 5
SCRAMBLE:
THE PHANTOM STRIKERS**

**DORAEMON
STORY OF SEASONS**

**AND MUCH
MORE!**

**JANUARY/
FEBRUARY 2020**

NEXT ISSUE



The dawn of NF's eighth year is nearly upon us, and 2020 is going to be a big one! To kick things off, we'll be immediately turning our attention to the city of Tokyo. Why? Well, one, because the Summer Olympics will be taking place there in 2020, and we've got a fresh *Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games* sequel to review for you. Two, Nintendo's bringing *Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE* to the Switch in January with a new *Encore* edition. Three, we've got our very own Tony Ponce ready to regale you all with tales of his three years living in Japan, which should particularly help out any prospective travelers who (four) are considering a trip to Tokyo to visit the new *Super Nintendo World*, which opens in just a few more months! Altogether, we're going to have a great time shining the spotlight on the dream destination for all gamers!





BETA CONTENT REVEALED

THE POKÉMON THAT NEVER WERE

Enterprising fans lift the curtain on dozens of Pocket Monster designs that never went public!

KEEPING TRACK OF the nearly 1,000 different Pokémon designs that have officially appeared throughout the last two decades is no small task. But consider the exponentially greater headache that must be constantly happening behind the scenes at Game Freak! The Pokémon we, the public, get to see represent only a fraction of those that really exist. There are thousands upon thousands of discarded, dismissed or still-in-development monster designs that are all taking up brain space in the minds of Game Freak's artists! Entire worlds of possible, potential Pokémon that just never made it all the way through the design process to ultimately meet the eyes of the audience on the outside looking in.

... With one major exception.

Way back in November 1997, Nintendo presented the annual Space World expo. (It was like the Big N's own E3 show, held every year until 2001, when they moved on to promoting their in-progress products at other events instead.) Though Space World 1997 took place just a year and a half after the release of Pokémon Red & Green in Japan (and nearly a full year before we in the West would get to play Gen I in English), Game Freak already had a demo of the second generation, Gold & Silver, ready to show off to show-goers.

It was wildly different than the final Gold & Silver, though! Gen II wasn't officially published in Japan until 1999, so this two-years-early demo was *really* early, in many different ways. The most interesting of those ways? The fact that it contained dozens upon dozens of Pokémon designs that later got drastically overhauled or entirely scrapped before the public ever saw them again!

For decades, the Space World 1997 Gold & Silver demo was a holy grail for Pokémon fans. If only we could actually get our hands on it, to confirm the scattered reports from the few attendees who'd played it in person years ago! They said they'd seen monsters that were never seen again, but there was just no way to follow up on those findings.

Until just last year! In 2018, an anonymous fan somehow got their hands on a copy of the infamous show floor demo and leaked the ROM containing all of its code onto the Internet. The hard-working data archeologists at The Cutting Room Floor quickly went to work dissecting every aspect of the demo's contents, then emerged with an insanely large amount of cut content to share with the greater Pokémon fandom! Normally video games have a few elements hiding in their code that never got used in the final game for whatever reason — but the Gold & Silver demo was a true gold mine!

You can see some examples above. Did you know that Octillery was originally intended to look like a tank? It makes its name make a whole lot more sense! At some point after showing off that demo, though, Game Freak must have decided such imagery was too violent, so the final Octillery became a more normal-looking octopus. (I'd love to see the beta design revived as a regional variant form in a future game, though!)

How about Pichu? It was originally just a ball,

pretty much, before being revised to adopt its final design.

Porygon2? That's it in the middle there! A totally different design from the rounded-off duck look we ultimately got — it was first intended to look like a lion!

Leafeon? It did end up getting introduced years later in Pokémon Diamond & Pearl, but digging through that 1997 demo data proved its concept was considered much earlier on.

And altered versions of official 'mons are just the tip of the iceberg! The real meat and potatoes are the dozens of Pokémon designs that are wholly unique and never ended up getting used. There are scrapped evolutions and pre-evolutions of existing creatures, as well as standalone lines that just never passed muster to be included in a final release. Some of them seem best left to disappear into the shadows of time (like Animon, the weird unused Ditto evolution seen above), while others are so charming that it's painful that they were never used! We've collected a dozen more examples on the adjacent page.

If you want to dig deeper and see all of the discoveries the fans have found, though, I must direct you to The Cutting Room Floor directly! Just prepare to have your mind blown by the sheer volume of Pokémon that never were. (And this is still only a fraction of them!) — LUCAS

tcrf.net/Proto:Pokémon_Gold_and_Silver/Pokémon

RACHEL'S RENDERS OF THE MONSTERS LOST TO TIME

Seeing the sprites extracted from the demo data is one thing, but even better is seeing them drawn in Ken Sugimori's signature style! One wonderfully talented artist, Rachel Briggs, has done just that! See her takes on a dozen of the lost 'mons below, then see her on Twitter @RacieBeep for many, many more!



HANAMOGURA

In the 1997 demo, Chikorita didn't evolve into Bayleef. Instead, it became this weird flower-looking goofball! (I'm glad that was changed.)



HONOOGUMA

Cyndaquil didn't yet exist in 1997, apparently, because the original Gold & Silver Fire-type starter was this little burning bear!



AQUARIA

The Totodile line was also absent in the demo, with the Water-type starters instead being a line that probably looked a little too similar to Lapras.



TAABAN

That big spiraling shell that chomps onto Slowbro's tail and Slowking's head? It was going to be its own standalone Pokémon at one point!



HINAAZU

The Gold & Silver games were originally going to have a whole lot more Baby Pokémon. Among the 10 or so that got axed was this Doduo pre-evo!



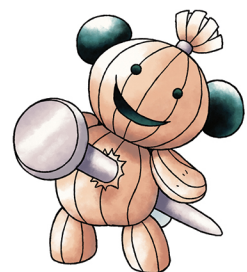
MADAME

Farfetch'd fans finally have its long-awaited evolution, Sirfetch'd, in Sword & Shield. But Gold & Silver first planned to introduce this evo instead!



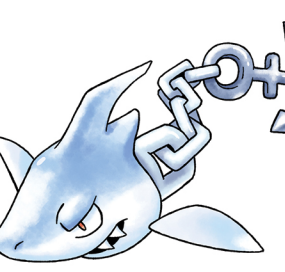
BOMUSHIKA

Gen I gave us Seel, and Gen III brought us Spheal. But apparently another seal was in the works for Gen II — this one a Fire-type!



NOROWARA

A living voodoo doll violently pierced through its chest with a massive nail? Yeah, I can see why this one was left on the cutting room floor.



IKARI

Sharpedo appeared to serve as the series' resident shark in Ruby & Sapphire, but this alternate idea for a terrifying tiburon came first.



WOLFMAN

Since the 1997 demo was never translated, we only have these characters' Japanese names. But apparently this one was in English?



SHIBIREFUGU

If you've ever thought about how useless Qwilfish is, join me in lamenting this lost evolution that likely would have made it part Electric-type!



KOTORA

Finally, the most crushing loss of all. Just look at this incredible little Electric-type tiger! Please bring this little guy back, Game Freak!!

USER-CREATED CONTENT

NF STAFF-MADE MARIO!

Can you conquer the creations of the Nintendo Force team?

OUR SINCEREST APOLOGIES for the delay!

I'd promised in Issue #41 that we'd have this selection of staff-made Mario Maker levels ready for Issue #42, but this is clearly Issue #43. Oh well! Where's that mistranslated Miyamoto quote people are always throwing around when you need it?

But seriously, holding off for one extra issue has allowed us to feature here a few newer levels that would not have made the cut if we'd printed this page in our October edition. Primarily Mr. Tony

Ponce's latest Mega Man epic, a seven-level remake of the Genesis-exclusive stages first seen in Mega Man: The Wily Wars! (Now available on the Sega Genesis Mini.) The last two levels listed here are from that set, and you'll find the rest by searching for Tony's other creations in the game itself.

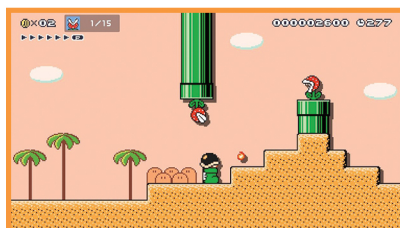
For the remainder, a grab bag of goodies – including one by young Carter Thomas! Do you have the skills to defeat precisely 65 Monty Moles and get to the goal? Let's find out! – **LUCAS**



MONTY MOLE MOUNTAIN

BY CARTER THOMAS

VNB-WGX-WVF



GARDEN OF EATIN'

BY REBECCA RUDRANATH

T9D-PSN-50H



GUSTY GLADE GALAXY

BY MATTHEW TARANTO

WS2-HPH-NQG



ANT FARM

BY BRETT MARTIN

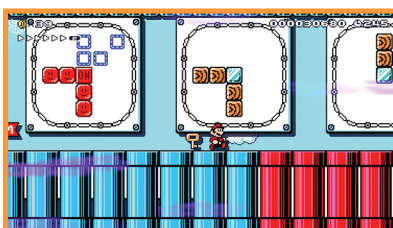
QW5-73R-27G



BUILDER MARIO'S BACKDOOR

BY MARK KELLY

8VS-P4C-HPF



THE TIME MACHINE OF TWISTER TOWN

BY MATTHEW TARANTO

GRF-P4F-GGF



THWOMP ON, THWOMP OFF

BY KEVIN KNEZEVIC

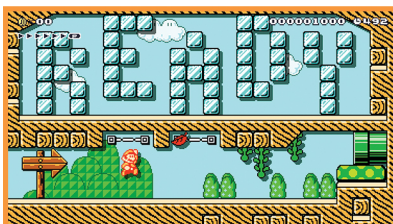
VRB-YNT-Y9G



SHOOT THE CORE!

BY TONY PONCE

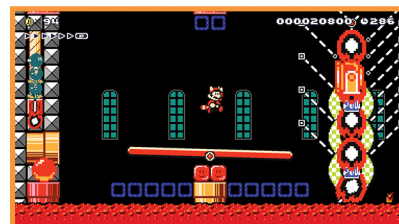
Q7Y-BXC-22G



BUSTER ROD-G

BY TONY PONCE

815-TYY-C4G



WILY TOWER 1

BY TONY PONCE

BS8-KC8-YFF



REVIEWS

The Galar region's not going anywhere... perhaps you might want to put off your next Pokémon quest long enough to explore a world with a different kind of Dragon type? Turn the page to read our full review of the brilliant **Dragon Quest XI S: Echoes of an Elusive Age – Definitive Edition!**





An Adventure for the Ages

DRAGON QUEST XI S: ECHOES OF AN ELUSIVE AGE – DEFINITIVE EDITION

THE QUINTESSENTIAL DRAGON QUEST has arrived.

Dragon Quest XI is the grandest, greatest adventure this seminal series has ever seen. And with its new Definitive Edition on the Switch, it's become even better than it was when it first debuted on PS4 and 3DS! I personally held off on playing it on other platforms, preferring to preserve the experience for myself until this edition arrived. And I'm happy I waited, since having this quest available both on the go and on the big screen has been sensational! Beyond just the natural benefits of being on this switchable system, though, there are many other

facets of its design that have made this one of my favorite JRPGs ever. So let's have a little fun here and break down this discussion into exactly XI pieces!

I. Dragon Quest XI S is a visual delight. From the very first mission in the game (which has you climbing to the top of a mountain and looking out over the horizon), you'll be met with sweeping vistas of a gorgeous world just begging to be explored. Every kind of landscape will greet you on your long journey, and each is beautifully realized — deserts bake in the sun, dungeons are just as dank and dreary as you'd expect and each town you come across has its own culture and unique style of architecture. Every scene is a treat for the eyes.

But the best aspect of the game's visual presentation is **II.** the animation. In battle, enemies spring to life with gloriously goofy exaggerated motions for every action they take. And the variety! Every enemy type seems to have more than one animation at the ready for each action, like different intro animations at the beginning of each battle (which helps sell the scene when multiple copies of the same creature appear to oppose you). One of the complaints angry Pokémon fans have lobbed toward Sword & Shield is that the Pokémon seem so stiff and lifeless in battle. And with hundreds of monsters to juggle, Game Freak has certainly been forced to keep things simple in that regard. But if you want the exact opposite,

Square Enix has provided it here. I'm constantly grinning just looking at these goobers in every battle.

III. Combat. Since we're on the subject, let's talk about how great those battles are, gameplaywise! A traditional turn-based combat system is in place here, but it's made to feel modern through the flexible options that you can choose to enable or not. You can direct every character's actions turn by turn, or turn on A.I. to let them act automatically with a few general tactical settings like "Focus on Healing" or "Don't Use MP." You can speed up every battle in order to get through them faster and more quickly return to exploration. You have full control over the party composition, and can even swap the main character out of combat duty when you recruit enough extra party members to field a different fighting force of four!

You might have trouble making the decision of which characters to equip and deploy, actually, because **IV.** the cast is incredible! I've found myself wishing I could use all of them at once, because it's just so satisfying to see Erik dual-wielding two knives, Jade flipping out like a Street Fighter character or Sylvando laughing haughtily before breathing fire in foes' faces.

Outside of battle, they're just as appealing, with spot-on voice acting and animation in cutscenes and great story moments to explore. Even better, you can **V.** customize them to your liking! Every cast member has multiple paths of possible progress to follow in developing as a fighter, and visually you'll come across several different costumes you can use to change up their default looks. The costumes show up in cutscenes, too!

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX
RATING: T





VI. Much of the equipment you'll use to outfit your crew you can create yourself through the surprisingly fun crafting system. Forging items was a part of Dragon Quest XI originally, but the Definitive Edition has emphasized the feature with the "Fun-Sized Forge" that allows you to stop what you're doing at any point and hammer out some new weapons, armor or accessories. It's fun to see an expensive sword on sale in a shop, but then skip out on buying it and forge a stronger version of the same blade by yourself!

And on the topic of saving money, Dragon Quest XI S is **VII.** an incredible value! This adventure is *loooooong*. You will be able to spend days, weeks and even months of your game time on this epic journey — which may seem intimidating, but is an undeniably good return on investment. I mean, really, when it's all said and done completionists will have probably spent something like 50 cents for each full hour of entertainment here? This is on the Breath of the Wild tier for great investments on the Switch. And if you aren't sure you want to dive in to such a big story? There's a crazily generous demo in the eShop that freely offers the first eight hours or so to all Switch owners. Try it out!

I think if you give it a chance, **VIII.** the story of Dragon Quest XI S will grab you and pull you in. It's just a joy. No spoilers here at all, but just the overall feeling of setting out on this adventure and exploring this world with this cast of characters simply makes my heart smile. I'm so happy to

be visiting this world every time I sit down and resume progress on my save file. It's like coming home again!

And part of that — but only part — is **IX.** the nostalgia that runs throughout this experience. Granted, it's not as palpable here in the West as it is for fans in Japan. Those in Square Enix's homeland who've played every single sequel in the series for over three decades will enjoy many more moments of "Hey, I remember the first time I saw *that* kind of enemy years ago!" and other similar sentiments, but even for someone with a more limited Dragon Quest history like me, the nods in places like simple sound effects are recognized and appreciated. (My 8-year-old self, chopping his way through the density of Dragon Warrior on the NES, would be well and truly blown away by how far this series has come!)

X. The nostalgia factor also fuels the full-game transformation that is 2D Mode! If you prefer, the absolute



entirety of Dragon Quest XI S can be played with the 3D visuals kicked to the curb in favor of a purely 16-bit presentation instead.

The amount of extra work that went into this is astonishing. They built the same game twice! (Three times, actually, since the older 3DS version had yet another visual style telling this same story!) I've stuck with the 3D look for the most part, but enjoyed dipping into 2D when visiting the segments of the first 10 Dragon Quest games that are included here as extra side story bonus content.

Finally, I've saved the worst for last. My praise for Dragon Quest XI S is almost universally glowing, but I do have to admit to some disappointment when it comes to **XI.** the game's soundtrack. What music is present here is phenomenal, especially now that the Definitive Edition is presenting full orchestral recordings of each track instead of the bog-quality MIDI versions that plagued the original

releases. It's just the lack of quantity I find annoying. The main theme plays over and over and over again — it's bombastic and energetic, sure, but it gets old with so many repeated uses. I feel like Dragon Quest XI misses the chance to better establish a unique sense of place in different environments when it keeps recycling the same tunes. Open field? Main theme. Scorching desert? Main theme again. Miserable, mucky marsh full of mud? Main theme! It's too much, and it's the one mark that's missed with this whole game, to me.

If you want to do the math, though, the 10 positives far outweigh the 11th factor being a negative. Dragon Quest XI S: Echoes of an Elusive Age — Definitive Edition is definitively excellent. This game has become my favorite Dragon Quest ever, one of my favorite JRPGs ever and certainly one of the best games you can buy and play on the Switch. Don't miss this adventure for the ages! — **LUCAS**

9.5





Return to Koholint Island

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: LINK'S AWAKENING

I ALMOST BROKE up with Zelda in 2017. We'd had our problems in the past (Ocarina of Time and A Link Between Worlds both left me cold) but in the end, we always worked things out. Then came Breath of the Wild. It was stupendous in fits and starts, but most of my time in ruined Hyrule was spent wandering and waiting for something interesting to happen. At age 42, the only thing I don't have enough of is time, so I want every game I play to have as many highs or lows per minute as possible. I had to ask myself if I had aged out of the demographic for these kinds of games, and it was a hard pill to swallow, but I did my best to get over it. "It's nobody's fault," I thought to myself.

"We just grew apart. Zelda may not be the same series I fell in love with all those years ago, but at least I'll always have Link's Awakening."

I had no idea how right I was.

It was as if Nintendo had read my internal break-up letter to Zelda and came to the rescue with the video game equivalent of flowers, candy and a year's worth of couples therapy. Link's Awakening is back — and not with a reboot or a pseudo-sequel, but with a virtual toybox. Koholint Island has become a massive interactive playset, home to the same quirky villagers and boyish Link that I grew up alongside, except with the charisma turned up to 11. My fears that Zelda isn't for me anymore are gone,

replaced with a childlike glee that I haven't felt for these games in a long time. In other words, I feel seen.

And as it turns out, I'm not alone! If you divide the Zelda family tree between 2D and 3D games, with Zelda 1 being the template for the former and Ocarina of Time the blueprint for the latter, then Link's Awakening might seem like an inconsequential half-step in the evolution of the top-down titles. But that's only if you're looking at how the games play. If you think about how they *feel*, a different split in the series emerges.

On one hand, you have the games that try to give players what they think they want from the Zelda brand: big open worlds, freedom to go wherever

they want and tons of powerful items to collect. A Link to the Past, Ocarina of Time, Twilight Princess and Breath of the Wild are the big names in that arena.

Then you have the oddballs. The games that trade in size, strength and wow factor for surrealism, surprises and small-town charm. Link's Awakening is where this branch of Zelda really got its start. Not only did it set the stage for Majora's Mask, Minish Cap, Skyward Sword and other polarizing Zelda games to follow, but it also inspired everything from cult classics like Chibi-Robo and Captain Rainbow to massive hits like Animal Crossing and Paper Mario.

In fact, if I had to sum up Link's Awakening in one line, I'd called it "an action-packed Animal Crossing prequel." Of course, that would be glossing over a lot of interesting details, like the battle between a Chain Chomp and a banana-loving monkey, the revelation that Dr. Wright from the SNES SimCity is a lonely letter writer and countless other adorable, eye-opening moments on display in Koholint. The game's map is densely packed with these sorts of ingenious little surprises from start to finish. It is a place to both flex your imagination and to sit in awe of the irreverent, creative whimsy of vintage '90s Nintendo.

That's why the game's toy aesthetic is so perfect. While the bigger, more straightlaced Zelda games give kids the chance to play hero, Link's Awakening lets adults feel like kids again, constantly rewarding them for just goofing around. Originally designed as a Game Boy exclusive, Link's Awakening knows that it can't





waste your time. Every item, every inch of the map and every NPC was designed to efficiently engage with you in a focused but strangely intimate way. Everything feels so close together, and every tool you acquire works to bring you in even closer.

Like the original game, Link's Awakening on Switch is not all that hard on the standard difficulty, and it doesn't take a long time to beat. Most will be done in about 12 hours, though for me it was more like 20. (I really got sucked into digging for all the new secrets and messing around with Dampé's Design-a-Dungeon toolkit, but really, I just wanted an excuse to keep playing.) In more ways than one, Link's Awakening is about entering the fleeting dream of a kind child and I was in no hurry to wake up.

It's too bad that frequent framerate issues make it hard to get fully immersed at first — but after you come to expect them, they aren't as noticeable. My only other complaint is that Nintendo didn't include a straight port of the Game Boy Color version of the game as an unlockable. It's fun to make connections between the original and the reimagining, like looking at baby pictures of my favorite

people. The convenience of being able to do that all on one console would have been nice.

Link's Awakening has the best platforming in the series, but many of its boss fights are brief and forgettable. Most of its weapons, dungeons and puzzles are on par with those in A Link to the Past and the like, but it almost doesn't matter. The game doesn't need to compete with its siblings. Instead, it transcends its lineage to give players something softer, stranger and more authentically touching than they may expect. That's why it's one of my favorite games of all time, Zelda or not.

I can only hope that its sales success will lead to a patch that fixes the framerate dips, and more importantly, the development of more Zelda games in this style. Fingers crossed for The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild 2: Return to Koholint (Again)!

— JONATHAN

9.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: GREZZO
RATING: E



SECOND OPINION AN EXCELLENT FIRST ZELDA

AS HAS BECOME more and more common (as I've had more and more kids), my primary interest in this Switch remake of a Zelda sequel I enjoyed as a child centered on my excitement to introduce it to my own children. I've been cheerfully revisiting Koholint on my own save file, sure, but even better than that have been the hours I've spent with the controller in the hands of nearly 8-year-old Carter and 5-year-old Calvin, because this toy-like reimagining of Link's Awakening has been a perfect way to interest them both in the greater Zelda franchise as a whole.

Though it hasn't been as hands-off as I thought it would be! Link's Awakening is more obtuse than I remembered, so I've had to help my kids more actively know where to go and what to do next — even with regular encounters with the guidance-giving owl and tip-telling phone booths spread around the island, the game's 1993 roots show through any time it becomes unclear what the next objective should be.

What's more, it's surprised me how rooted in the past the game still is on a technical level — it's still behaving like a Game Boy game in ways like how slashed grass respawns the instant you move the screen just slightly out of view of it. Why? That made sense back on the Game Boy when the entire overworld was segmented into single-screen squares, but it's immersion-breaking here when the camera's been freed up to flow more naturally.

Oh well. That's just a grumble from an old fan (though not quite as old as Mr. Holmes just yet!). Carter and Calvin have never noticed such artifacts of yesteryear, as they've been too busy experiencing for the first time that magic and whimsy we old-timers first enjoyed over a quarter-century ago!

— LUCAS

8.5





Adventures in the Other World

NI NO KUNI: WRATH OF THE WHITE WITCH

SCIENCE FICTION ELEMENTS are often snuck into JRPGs through various means, and *Ni no Kuni* experiments with parallel worlds. Each being in our hero Oliver's town of Motorville has a "soulmate" in another world. Unbeknownst to most beings in Motorville, the two worlds are inexplicably linked, and actions in one can affect the other.

When Oliver's Mom perishes while trying to save him from an accident, he cries onto a plush that becomes the fairy Mr. Drippy, an odd little creature with a heavy Welsh accent and more personality than body. Mr. Drippy convinces Oliver to return to his world to end the wrath of the evil Shadar, but through the opening scenes the audience learns that the true antagonist is the titular White Witch — and

she appears to have magic that affects events in both worlds. A prophecy has pegged our protagonist as the one person who can impede her plans. Oliver then meets other allies — like the fierce but fair Esther and the despicable but loyal thief Swaine — who help him on his quest. While several common JRPG tropes are in place, it does not stop this game from being a unique, charming experience with great plot elements, fantastic environments, imagination and heart.

Several styles tell the story, including hand-drawn anime cutscenes from Studio Ghibli, fully voiced dialogue sequences and regular gameplay. It is somewhat jarring to see the two styles together, but Level 5 has translated the Studio Ghibli style into 3D expertly — it's a lot like playing an anime!

The gameplay often feels like you're rushed, but forced to wait. You're told you need to go somewhere quickly, but in order to get there you need to complete long quests that may or may not be contingent on finding a special item or fighting a boss. The flow of the game suffers a bit, but the locales are truly gorgeous, the characters are as charismatic as you'd expect from this collaboration and the presentation as a whole ends up being cohesive and playful.

Anthropomorphic animals and humans seemingly all have problems for Oliver and company to solve, building a network of myriad sidequests. Some involve simple errands, while others are battles or fetch-quests. These prepare you for the more challenging bosses with rewards.

And then there's the alchemy and familiar raising! In the former you mix all sorts of ingredients to get items, while the latter involves catching, feeding and battling with your battle pals known as "familiars."

I spent around 60 hours with the game, finished the main story and completed many sidequests, but felt the alchemy and familiar raising was largely superfluous or too tedious for the reward output. You can have nearly every enemy in the game join your party, and each has food it likes to boost stats and help you in battle in different ways. The game has a massive compendium of knowledge between the Wizard's Companion book and the pause menu to help with the complex world and its inhabitants, but I never felt I had all the info I needed to master these gaming elements. Despite this, it's easy to pick up due to the great quest log and journal.

The added portability of this port enhances its playability exponentially, and there's such a complicated plot that I would rather not spoil any of it for you. Just know you'll be using lots of great magic spells, meeting fantastical creatures, becoming too attached to little beasties, visiting amazing locations and even flying on a friendly dragon's back!

Ni no Kuni took a while to come to a Nintendo system in the West. But it's been worth the wait! — **BRETT**



9.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER: BANDAI NAMCO
DEVELOPER: LEVEL-5
RATING: E10+



The Series is Back... Kind Of

CONTRA: ROGUE CORPS

AS A FAN of Contra from the very first mission on the NES, the reveal of Contra: Rogue Corps at this year's E3 elicited a wide range of emotions within me. Excitement, because this is the first new Contra game in more than 10 years. Trepidation, because it was in 3D, and 3D and Contra have historically not gotten along very well (the pseudo-3D fortress stages of the original notwithstanding). And perhaps above all, curiosity. After all, it was being produced by Nobuya Nakazato, who has held various roles in numerous entries within the series ever since Contra III: The Alien Wars on the Super NES all the way back in 1992.

I found the free downloadable demo utterly fascinating, and the game itself just as much so. I can clearly see what they were going for with this title, but less clear is the answer to the question: Does it work? Yes... and no.

The game definitely gives off a *very* Contra vibe, though it may not necessarily be the parts of the franchise that most players are familiar with. Rogue Corps combines elements like the grittiness and grotesque body horror of 2002's Contra: Shattered Soldier with the more over-the-top action and sense of humor that first appeared in The Alien Wars, but arguably hit its zenith in 2004's Neo Contra.

That's on the surface, however. Dig deeper, and you'll find a very different beast.

Nakazato reportedly sought to evolve the Contra formula for a modern audience, and that apparently includes turning it from a mostly side-scrolling, occasionally overhead run-'n-gun into something of a mostly overhead twin-stick looter shooter. Players have a life meter — not a first for the series, but a rarity — and are unable to fire their weapons constantly (due to overheating), which is definitely a first for the series.

It's odd to have a Contra game in which you can't just hammer the fire button indiscriminately and without regard. It walks a fine line, not running out *too* quickly, but enough to keep things interesting by having you swap between weapons — an increasing trend, it would seem. It also helps

incentivize the hunt for new materials, which can be used to alleviate the issue to some degree.

The game's presentation is varied, in both style and quality. Gameplay visuals are comparable to early GameCube era titles, while motion comic-style cutscenes (some recreating iconic moments from earlier Contra games), brought to life by Emilio Lopez, look amazing. The adrenaline-pumping music of past entries is all but absent, though a familiar tune ramps up on occasion.

Other aspects are gloriously, unapologetically stupid, in a goofy '90s comic book sort of way. There's lots of cussing, and it comes off as a bit "tryhard," which will likely be funny to adults while coming off as don't-let-Mom-hear cool to those who are probably too young to be hearing it.

Strangely, multiplayer — a popular tenet of Contra — is a separate mode, and includes online and local components for up to four players. But unfortunately, try as I might, I just couldn't find anyone to rally to my cause.

But the most egregious thing this game does is not allowing you to pause *in single-player!* Everything else aside, that is just unforgivable in my eyes.

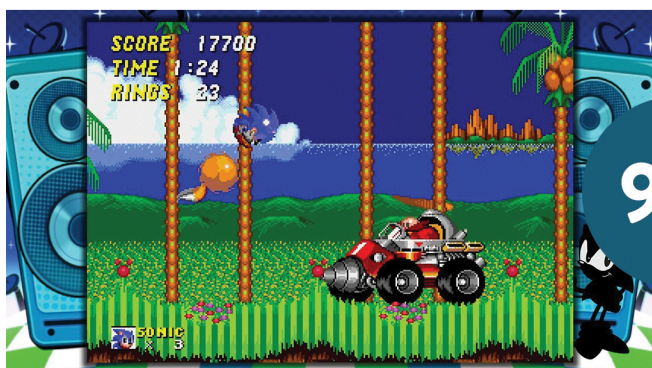
So, does Rogue Corps work as a Contra game? In several ways, yes, but in the way most people (only a handful really care about Contra lore, and one of them is writing this piece) give the greatest importance, gameplay? You might want to look at Blazing Chrome or the Contra Anniversary Collection instead.

But on its own merits? I'll be honest: For all its perplexing, strange and sometimes outright defiant design decisions, I still had fun playing it. And that's what matters most, right?

— DAVID



SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER:
KONAMI RATING: M



9.0

Condensed Blast Processing

THE SEGA GENESIS MINI

"GENESIS DOES WHAT NINTENDON'T."

These were the four simple words that ignited a war. In a way, it was a philosophy as much as it was a tagline, as Sega sought to establish a foothold in the fledgling North American video game market by providing something of an alternative for fans who might have been ready to move on from the 8-bit Nintendo Entertainment System.

Interestingly, while that war is long over and both company's mascots now do their best impression of Dutch and Dillon from Predator to commemorate the Olympic Games every few years, I can't help but feel that the release and success of the Super NES Classic (to say nothing of the fervor surrounding the NES Classic) must have stirred some sense of their old rivalry within Sega.

On its shiny black surface, the Sega Genesis Mini practically screams "Genesis Does What Nintendon't." "You have 21 games?" Sega says, looking at the SNES Classic's tally. "We'll have 22. You have one never-before-released game? We'll have two. No licensed titles? Mickey and Donald say, 'Hiya, pal! Good to see ya!'"

This extends all the way to the case of the device itself, accurately mimicking a shrunken-down Model 1 Sega Genesis in form, if not function: "High Definition Graphics" label? Check. Working power switch and reset button? Check. Opening cartridge slot? Check. Volume slider? Check.

Headphone jack? Check. Removable panel for the Sega CD expansion port? Check and mate.

For those inclined, they've even gone so far as to release accessory bundles that allow you to recreate the "Tower of Power" with a purely decorative Model 1 Sega CD, 32X and a plethora of cartridges, including Sonic & Knuckles for that extra bit of "Lock-On Technology" height. (At the moment, these are only available in Japan; Western plans are up in the air as of this writing.) Even the box closely resembles that of a 1991 Model 1 Sega Genesis.

The front of the console keeps things clean, too. Rather than a removable facade that hides a pair of proprietary controller ports, the Sega Genesis Mini cuts straight to the chase with a pair of USB ports right where the original controller ports were. That said, while the ports may be a

more common standard, it seems only certain controllers (likely just those licensed for use with the console) will actually work.

On that front, the console comes with two full-size replicas of the original three-button controllers, which has caused some grumbling among fans. Fortunately, the vast majority of the games included here make little use of the additional buttons, though the fighting games Street Fighter II: Special Champion Edition and Eternal Champions are considerably hampered by the three-button layout, requiring players to use the Start button to swap between punches and kicks. (Official six-button options are sold separately.)

The included game library features a solid selection of titles that do well to represent what made the Sega Genesis so special during its run. There are iconic releases, sentimental favorites and even some long-lost and hidden gems among them. The most glaring omissions would be the lack of sports games, which were a strong foundation for Sega's rise to prominence back in the day, and Sonic 3 & Knuckles, which — while a personal favorite — is understandably absent.

Thanks to M2, the games run well and feature the kinds of options you would expect, from save states to CRT filters and wallpapers. Some players have noted a tiny delay in some games' sound effects, but I don't think I would have noticed had attention not been drawn to it. As an added bonus, you can switch the regions the games are presented in, and those with alternate versions will be shown and played instead.

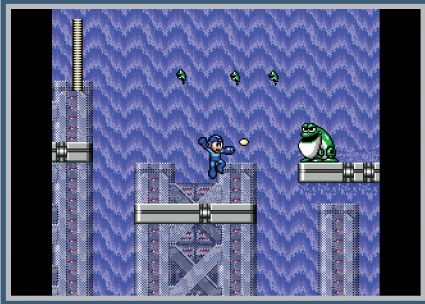
All told, if you're a fan of Sega, or even just someone who has been curious about checking them out, this is a must-have. The only reason I can imagine not wanting this is if you already own all the original stuff and can connect it all in HD! — DAVID



GENESIS PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: M2 RATING: T

DAVID'S PICKS FOR THE NINE BEST REASONS TO BUY THE MINI

Mega Drive Mega Fan David Oxford knows more than most about your best bets to play today from Sega's 16-bit history. He also knows that you've had lots of other ways to revisit the Genesis library in recent years — so here are a few choice selections from among the Genesis Mini's catalog of 42 total that should push you toward purchasing it in particular!



MEGA MAN: THE WILY WARS

Never released in North America outside of the Sega Channel, this compilation updates the first three NES Mega Man titles into 16-bit, à la Super Mario All-Stars. And once you've beaten those, you'll unlock additional original content in Wily Tower. While not the best way to play the trilogy, it provides a great refresh for longtime fans.



GHOULS 'N GHOSTS

Though the first and third entries in the Ghosts 'n Goblins series made it home to Nintendo consoles in the '80s and '90s, the second wasn't so lucky. This port of the arcade game was developed by Sega themselves and programmed by legendary Sonic co-creator Yuji Naka prior to the Blue Blur's creation, lending it additional historical value.



STRIDER

While Capcom's Strider for the NES adapted the manga into something more Metroidvania-like, Sega instead opted to port the rather different arcade game to their new 16-bit hardware. Though NES Strider might feature more depth in its gameplay, the arcade's over-the-top hack-'n-slash action earned it a devoted following.



ROAD RASH II

Though Road Rash seems to have all but faded from the minds of Electronic Arts, the Sega Genesis Mini has brought it back to the masses for the first time since the turn of the century. Race other bikers through various locales, nab their weapons and use them to take the lead, all while evading traffic and the cops!



ALISIA DRAGOON

A unique game that combines shoot-'em-up and platforming gameplay with a bit of strategy, as Alisia fires bolts of lightning that home in on enemies automatically, but their power decreases the more she uses them without recharging. In addition, she's aided by four pet creatures who help protect her, but have their own life meters.



MONSTER WORLD IV

Arguably the best entry in the celebrated Wonder Boy/Monster World series, this somewhat Zelda II-ish adventure game only first arrived in North America in 2012, following a wait of nearly two decades. Neither this nor its predecessor, Wonder Boy in Monster World (also included here), are found in Sega Genesis Classics on the Switch.



SUPER FANTASY ZONE

Sunsoft's sequel to Sega's seminal cute-'em-up was released in Europe and Japan way back in 1992, but North American fans of sentient spaceship Opa-Opa had to wait until 2008 to explore this corner of the Fantasy Zone. After two 3D Classics releases and the Wii Shop Channel's closure, this is now the only place to play it.



CASTLE OF ILLUSION

Before Sonic sprang into action as Sega's mascot, the company partnered with none other than Disney to deliver some quality sidescrolling platforming action for all ages. Its licensed nature makes this one of the most surprising inclusions on the Mini console! A remake hit in 2013, but this original version is more fondly remembered.



WORLD OF ILLUSION

Not as fondly remembered as Castle of Illusion, nor given the benefit of a remake or re-release until now, World of Illusion changes things up a bit. Magic capes replace hoppin' 'n boppin', and players can choose whether to adventure as Mickey, Donald or both in two-player co-op, with each option changing how things play out.

ASK THE FORCE

IS OFFENSE THE BEST DEFENSE?
OR IS DEFENSE THE BEST OFFENSE?



CHRIS

Having played a lot of fighting games and shooters/shmups, I've learned that timing is of the essence, and offense is king: the faster you take someone out, the less damage they do. Same principle applies to MMOs: If you do enough damage you can "phase push" and avoid entire elements of encounters altogether!



REBECCA

I'm the type that likes to rush in, guns blazing/swords swinging. Admittedly, stealth mechanics are my biggest weakness.



TONY

Whoa there! That's touching upon very personal territory! Forgive me for getting defensive, but I find the question to be extremely offensive!



MARK

A fence is definitely the best defense against nosey neighbors snooping on your petunias!



JONATHAN

But Bug-Away spray is the best defense and offense against those pesky mosquitos. Just don't use the aerosol can. It's offensive to the eyes — and the ozone layer!



Have a Dose of a Freaky Ghost

GHOSTBUSTERS: THE VIDEO GAME REMASTERED

7.5

THIS IS THE game I've followed the most, from start to finish, in my gaming career. It had a very rocky development cycle and almost got cancelled before Atari rescued it. It's a wonder it got made, but I'm so glad it did! It is a love letter of pure fandom from Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis, who wrote the script and defined the premise. They even got most of the films' actors to reprise their roles, like Bill Murray (who was a long-time holdout for a never-realized third movie).

Ghostbusters: The Video Game gives you a quick injection of nostalgia that quickly throws you back into the world of the boys in beige. A psychic shock-wave from a Gozer museum exhibit stirs up paranormal activity all over Manhattan. This sets Slimer free, he heads to the Sedgewick Hotel, and soon after you'll be fighting Stay Puft in Times Square. You'll visit the museum, the New York Public Library and new locations like Shandor Island and Central Park as the plot unfolds, and its material is definitely worthy of another adventure. Canonically, fans consider this the third story in the series, taking place two years after the events of Ghostbusters II. I play it for the story and the sheer quotability of the script, because now, a decade after its initial release, it's definitely showing its age.

The Switch release of the game is remastered in name alone, as I could find very little difference between the PS3/Xbox 360 version and the Switch edition. It feels and looks the same,

meaning it's essentially just a port. This is fine to add portability to the game, but the PS4 version is much crisper, faster and actually easier to play. The animations are still a bit amateurish at times even on the PS4, so efforts seem to be more focused on hair, lighting and upping the poly count — but that's all indiscernible on the Switch. The weird save system is still in place, leaving you guessing where exactly the game will place you should you shut it off, and you only get one save slot per profile.

The PS4 version added some audio directionality, so when you face a fellow Ghostbuster they're louder — but the Switch version seems to use the same audio functionality as on PS3 and Xbox 360. Venkman's lines are sometimes practically inaudible, so make sure to use subtitles so you don't miss a quip!

As for gameplay, it's story-driven, very linear and can feel repetitive. Most players were more forgiving during its initial release because narrative-focused games were just coming into

their own, but now several games have taught us how to do it better.

At this point, Ghostbusters: The Video Game Remastered is for superfans who don't mind a slog for the next comedic or canonic payoff. The equipment is fun to experiment with and is introduced intelligently, and if the multiplayer they plan to add is like the original's it will be fun and exciting (until it isn't). If you've already played older versions, it isn't necessarily worth going back in, as there's nothing new to note except visuals — but if you haven't played it and even remotely enjoy the prospect of ghostbusting, then it's absolutely worth a play! — **BRETT**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SABER INTERACTIVE
RATING: T DEVELOPER: TERMINAL REALITY





A More Affordable Alternative

THE NINTENDO SWITCH LITE

LET'S GET THIS out of the way: the Nintendo Switch Lite is not really a Switch.

The Lite might play (most) Switch games, but it's missing all of the key features that make the original Switch such a big deal. There's no option to connect the Lite to a television, and no Joy-Cons to conveniently snap off for impromptu multiplayer adventures.

The thing is, the Lite isn't really meant to be a Switch. If anything, it feels more like a successor to the 2DS: a cheap, simple handheld without any of the bells and whistles that are selling points for its older sibling.

That said, *what a handheld!* In terms of portability, convenience and price (\$199 vs. \$299), the Lite blows the vanilla Switch out of the water.

I've always felt like the Switch is just a hair's breadth too big to be truly portable — or indeed, comfortable. I had a feeling I'd get along just fine with the Lite, but I was amazed at just how quickly I fell in love with the console once I had it in my hands. The slightly smaller and lighter size means that the Lite is a lot more comfortable to hold for hours at a time. It's easier to pack into a bag and carry around, and the reduced screen size makes the 720p resolution even sharper than the original Switch. It is an absolute joy to hold the Lite, and its petite design fixes a lot of my

minor gripes about playing Switch games in Handheld Mode.

There is an inherent difference between playing a handheld and a home console. When you're playing around a television, games become a social affair, with everyone in the room contributing to the experience. Playing a handheld, on the other hand, is more intimate. This is your private, personal little world; you can essentially disappear inside Hyrule or Fódlan or New Donk City without having to worry about the outside world around you.

For this reason, while I do find it a little disappointing that the Switch Lite can't hook up to a television, I don't find myself missing the experience all that much. I'm simply forced to play games by myself, and that clear, uninterrupted headspace serves to make my single-player time more enjoyable.

It's often the case that Nintendo products come with certain unusual limitations, which can seem frustrating, but which serve an important purpose. The Switch Lite's lack of television connectivity is one such issue: What appears to be a flaw is actually one of its greatest strengths.

That said, the handheld personal experience won't be for everyone. Chances are, if you're reading this review, you weren't Nintendo's target audience when they designed the

Switch Lite. I can't honestly say that anyone who already owns a Switch will get the most out of the Lite — especially considering how much of a pain it can be to share digital games between the two devices.

The Switch Lite is only an adequate replacement for a regular Switch if, like me, you always play in Handheld Mode and never want to share your games with other people. This is an incredible device, but it's going to come down to personal preference as to whether the loss of some of the Switch's more important features will ruin your experience.

It's also worth noting that this is not by any means a perfect machine. There are a few design elements that feel vestigial — the USB-C charging port, for example, is on the bottom of the Switch Lite, even though it doesn't need to fit into a dock. This makes it a little uncomfortable to play games while the Lite is charging.

On paper, the Lite's battery life is supposed to be marginally better than the original version of the Switch. In practice, though, it feels a lot worse — simply because the Lite can't be docked for television play, so it's always relying on the internal battery. Unhelpfully, the games that look best on the big screen will of course drain the battery fastest.

There's also the inescapable specter of Joy-Con drift. I find myself constantly worrying about pushing the

unit's controls too hard, lest I accidentally damage something. I even find this with the buttons on the machine, which feel slightly less durable than the regular Switch. I'm worried that, with enough use, my A and B buttons in particular might lose some of their delightfully tactile click. It'll be hard to measure the Lite's durability until it's been in use for a year or more, but I wouldn't be surprised if it endures consistent wear and tear poorly.

The Switch Lite is not going to be to everyone's taste. As cute and small and convenient as it may be, some people are simply not going to be able to look past its quirks and limitations.

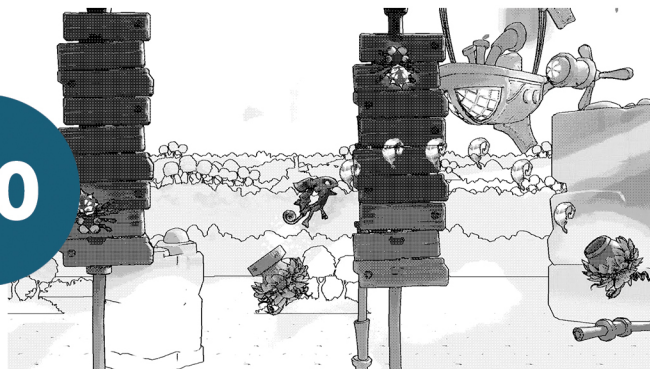
In my opinion, though, the Lite is exactly the device I'd been waiting for. I'm willing to forego connecting it to the television in favor of playing by myself, in brief moments around other activities, or in long, uninterrupted sessions of quiet time.

The Switch Lite might not be a particularly versatile Switch, but it's definitely the best Game Boy I've ever played! — **MATTHEW L.**

9.0



9.0



The Team of Two Turns to 2D

YOOKA-LAYLEE AND THE IMPOSSIBLE LAIR

TWO YEARS AGO, former Rare staffers under the Playtonic banner delivered Yooka-Laylee — and nostalgic gamers, eager to return to the brand of 3D collectathon platforming that underscored the Nintendo 64 era, accepted that gift with gratitude. But while the game looked and played exactly like a long-awaited Banjo-Kazooie sequel, the overall experience felt a touch off — as though a close friend had been replaced by a pod person that retained all their memories, yet exhibited none of their warmth.

So yeah, I didn't have much faith in Yooka-Laylee and the Impossible Lair prior to my review. However, if there's a takeaway from my experience, it's that everyone ought to have a little more faith!

This not-quite-a-sequel ditches the third dimension in favor of a side-scrolling romp akin to Rare's DKC trilogy on SNES. From swinging ropes to Barrel Cannon-like bushes to a mid-air rolling jump technique nicked directly from the Lizard & Bat combo's simian forebears, the Donkey Kong Country inspirations are blatant. Now, Playtonic could've simply repurposed old material and called it a night, but they took additional measures to prove that they're not entirely bound to those past glories.

Yooka-Laylee's quest bucks tradition by beginning at the end: the titular Impossible Lair, an intimidating crucible of enemies, death traps and multiple tussles against the big boss himself, Capital B, with nary a check-

point in sight. Is the Lair literally impossible? Obviously not! Will you clear it on your first attempt? Not unless you're a gaming savant straight out of an 1989 underdog movie!

You're free to retry the Lair as often as you wish, though more sensible players wouldn't object to a little extra insurance. That's where the Beettalion comes in — out of gratitude for emancipating these bee soldiers from the game's numerous Chapters, they'll absorb up to 48 hits to protect the heroes during subsequent Lair runs. Just as Breath of the Wild allowed players to challenge Calamity Ganon immediately after leaving the Great Plateau, Yooka-Laylee grants them the freedom to gauge their own capabilities. Will you aim for total completion, or are you comfortable with but a modicum of assistance?

Should you settle in for the long haul, you'll be treated to a level design masterclass worthy of the Rare legacy. Each of the game's 20 Chapters is perfectly paced, with a healthy degree of difficulty counterbalanced by an abundance of checkpoints to encourage perseverance — there's even a "Super Guide" mechanic that allows you to skip tough sections after dying too many times. The intensity is further heightened thanks once again to composers Grant Kirkhope and David Wise, who've woven a musical tapestry that DK himself wouldn't hesitate to add to the top of his playlist!

As entertaining as tackling these tricky traps may be, navigating the overworld may be even more engaging. This isn't some static map in which you travel along preset paths toward your next destination! Rather,

it shares more in common with the previous Yooka-Laylee's massive environments — there are sliding block and electrical circuit puzzles, hidden Play-Tonics that add level modifiers when equipped and various NPCs in need of your assistance. You'll even bump into your skeazy pal Trowser, who blocks access to portions of the overworld with literal Paywalls that are unlocked by spending T.W.I.T. Coins acquired from the various Chapters.

What truly sets this overworld into a league of its own are the State Changes. By triggering an event on the map to physically alter a Chapter's state — redirect a stream to flood one level, or repair a sentient AC unit to generate violent winds in another — you gain access to a harder version with its own set of T.W.I.T. Coins and a

Beettalion prisoner. Hours into my adventure, for instance, I happened upon a chill frog with a yen for primo fishing; after directing him to a choice spot in the game's earliest area, he reeled in the village from the very first Chapter, sowing ruin upon a once pleasant destination. Other lesser games may present remixed levels via a boring text menu, but Yooka-Laylee's organic unlock method makes you feel like your actions have a tangible impact on a living, breathing universe.

From top to bottom, Yooka-Laylee and the Impossible Lair is tighter and leaner compared to Playtonic's freshman effort. Despite an excruciating 75-second loading window upon loading a save file (which, yeah, needs to be addressed in a future patch), the Switch build is a powerhouse that runs at a smooth 60fps the majority of the time and features no other glaring technical faults.

I had doubts concerning Playtonic's ability to evolve past their '90s game design mentality, but they've proved this naysayer wrong with a strong rebound performance! The lot of you have my permission to be excited about Yooka-Laylee again! — TONY

SWITCH PUBLISHER: TEAM17
DEVELOPER: PLAYTONIC
RATING: E



ARCHIVE

The complete list of Nintendo Force retail reviews from the past two years. Scores reflect individual reviewers' opinions.

SWITCH

TITLE	SCORE	REVIEWER	ISSUE
Astral Chain	8.5	Jonathan	#42
Batman: The Telltale Series	8.0	Lucas	#32
Bayonetta	9.0	Daan	#32
Bayonetta 2	9.0	Daan	#32
Blade Strangers	7.0	Jonathan	#36
Captain Toad: Treasure Tracker	7.5	Neal	#35
Crash Bandicoot N. Sane Trilogy	7.5	David	#35
Crash Team Racing: Nitro-Fueled	8.0	David	#41
Crystal Crisis	9.0	Jonathan	#40
Daemon X Machina	7.0	Chris	#42
Dark Souls: Remastered	8.0	Chris	#37
Diablo III: Eternal Collection	9.0	Nadia	#37
Dragon Ball FighterZ	8.0	Tony	#36
Dragon Quest Builders	9.0	Lucas	#32
Dragon Quest Builders 2	9.0	Shesez	#41
Dreamworks Dragons: Dawn of New Riders	7.5	David	#39
Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze	9.5	David	#34
DOOM	8.0	Tony	#33
Fire Emblem: Three Houses	9.5	Lucas	#41
Fitness Boxing	5.5	Chris	#38
Guacamelee! One-Two Punch Collection	9.0	Jonathan	#42
Hyrule Warriors: Definitive Edition	7.5	Neal	#34
Ittle Dew 2+	8.0	Lucas	#32
Katamari Damacy REROLL	9.5	Tony	#38
Kirby Star Allies	7.0	Brett	#33
L.A. Noire	8.0	Kevin C.	#31
LEGO DC Super-Villains	8.0	Thor	#38
LEGO Marvel Super Heroes 2	7.5	David	#32
Little Dragons Café	7.0	Rebecca	#36
Mario Tennis Aces	6.5	Lucas	#35
Marvel Ultimate Alliance 3: The Black Order	7.0	Brett	#41
Mega Man 11	11/13	David	#36
Mega Man Legacy Collection	9.0	Neal	#34
Mega Man Legacy Collection 2	7.0	Neal	#34
Mega Man X Legacy Collection	9.5	Jonathan	#35
Mega Man X Legacy Collection 2	7.0	Jonathan	#35
Monster Boy and the Cursed Kingdom	8.5	David	#38
Monster Hunter Generations Ultimate	7.5	Kevin K.	#37
Moonlighter	8.0	Lucas	#39
My Time at Portia	5.5	Chris	#40
Namco Museum Arcade Pac	7.0	Brett	#38
New Super Mario Bros. U Deluxe	8.0	Lucas	#38
Nickelodeon Kart Racers	5.0	David	#37
Nintendo Labo Robot Kit	7.5	Lucas	#34
Nintendo Labo Variety Kit	8.5	Lucas	#34
Nintendo Labo Vehicle Kit	8.5	Lucas	#36
Nintendo Labo VR Kit	9.0	Lucas	#40
Octopath Traveler	8.5	Brett	#35
Overcooked! 2	7.0	Brett	#35

Owlboy	9.5	Chris	#33
Paw Patrol: On a Roll	8.5	Lucas	#37
Pokémon: Let's Go, Pikachu! & Let's Go, Eevee!	8.5	Lucas	#37
Resident Evil Revelations	8.0	Jonathan	#31
Resident Evil Revelations 2	8.5	Jonathan	#31
RiME	7.0	Lucas	#33
Runner3	8.0	Kevin C.	#34
Scribblenauts Mega Pack	7.5	David	#37
Scribblenauts Showdown	7.5	David	#33
Sega Genesis Classics	8.5	Brett	#38
Shantae: Half-Genie Hero – Ultimate Edition	8.0	Tony	#34
Shining Resonance Refrain	7.0	Neal	#36
SNK 40th Anniversary Collection	8.5	Thor	#38
Sonic Forces	7.5	David	#31
Sonic Mania Plus	9.0	Tony	#35
Spyro Reignited Trilogy	9.0	David	#42
Star Wars Pinball	9.0	Lucas	#42
Starlink: Battle for Atlas	8.5	David	#37
Street Fighter 30th Anniversary Collection	8.5	Jonathan	#34
Super Dragon Ball Heroes: World Mission	6.0	Tony	#40
Super Mario Maker 2	10	Tony	#41
Super Mario Odyssey	9.5	Lucas	#31
Super Mario Party	9.0	Lucas	#36
Super Smash Bros. Ultimate	10	Lucas	#37
Sushi Striker: The Way of Sushido	7.5	Rebecca	#34
Team Sonic Racing	8.5	David	#41
The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim	9.0	Neal	#31
The End is Nigh	8.5	Jonathan	#31
The LEGO Ninjago Movie Video Game	8.0	David	#31
The World Ends With You: Final Remix	6.5	Rebecca	#37
Tiny Barbarian DX	8.5	Robert	#31
Travis Strikes Again: No More Heroes	8.0	Jonathan	#38
Valkyria Chronicles 4	8.5	Neal	#36
Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus	8.5	Neal	#35
Wolfenstein: Youngblood	7.0	Chris	#41
WWE 2K18	3.0	Lucas	#32
Xenoblade Chronicles 2	8.0	Kevin K.	#32
Xenoblade Chronicles 2: Torna ~ The Golden Country	8.5	Kevin K.	#36
Yonder: The Cloud Catcher Chronicles	7.0	Neal	#35
Yoshi's Crafted World	7.5	Lucas	#39
Ys VIII: Lacrimosa of DANA	9.5	Lucas	#36

3DS

TITLE	SCORE	REVIEWER	ISSUE
Detective Pikachu	7.0	Rebecca	#33
Etrian Odyssey Nexus	8.5	Nadia	#39
Etrian Odyssey V: Beyond the Myth	6.5	Neal	#31
Kirby Battle Royale	6.0	Mark	#31
Kirby's Extra Epic Yarn	7.5	Neal	#39
Layton's Mystery Journey: Katrielle and the Millionaires' Conspiracy	7.5	Chris	#31
Luigi's Mansion	8.0	Neal	#36
Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story + Bowser Jr.'s Journey	9.0	Neal	#38
Mario Party: The Top 100	6.0	Daan	#31
Minecraft: New Nintendo 3DS Edition	5.5	Chris	#31
Monster Hunter Stories	8.5	Lucas	#31
Persona Q2: New Cinema Labyrinth	8.0	Matthew L.	#40
Pokémon Ultra Moon	9.0	Thor	#31
Pokémon Ultra Sun	8.5	Rebecca	#31
Radiant Historia: Perfect Chronology	8.0	Thor	#33
The Alliance Alive	5.5	Neal	#33
WarioWare Gold	8.5	Thor	#35
Yo-kai Watch 3	8.5	Lucas	#39
Yo-kai Watch Blasters: Red Cat Corps & White Dog Squad	6.5	Lucas	#37



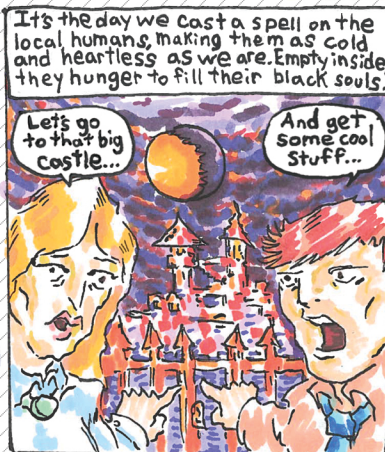
REVIEW REMINDER POKÉMON: LET'S GO, PIKACHU! & LET'S GO, EEVEE!

POKÉMON'S ABOUT TO be in competition with itself on the Switch. With the arrival of Sword & Shield, new fans of the franchise who have yet to experience the series on Nintendo's newest hardware will have to face the decision of whether to go with one of those newest sequels, or else look backward by one calendar year and consider a purchase of 2018's Let's Go, Pikachu! or Let's Go, Eevee! instead. The two options are quite distinct from one another, as Sword & Shield are being presented as the newest installments in the "mainline" Pokémon series and offer the brand's traditional RPG gameplay, while the Let's Go spin-off brand was made to appeal more directly to newcomers with its easier quest and somewhat gimmicky gameplay control that focused, in my view, too much on motion. However! With the arrival of the new Nintendo Switch Lite, I wanted to revisit that complaint that I first made a year ago and offer a stronger recommendation of the Let's Go games if it's your intention to play Pokémon on one of the new Lite systems. Its portable-only design means the worst play control parts of the Let's Go titles won't pop up (no Joy-Cons to deal with), so it'll be smoother and more fun overall! — **LUCAS**

The Suite Life of Drac & Grody



Black Pre-Sabbath



Simon Belmont amiibo in stores November 2014

BY JONATHAN HOLMES



INTERVIEW



DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH

December 10, 1987,
in Hilversum, the Netherlands

FAVORITE FOOD

Honestly? Probably just a
good burger, haha!

LITTLE-KNOWN FACTS

I was never actually an official
part/employee of Vlambeer.

CURRENT POSITION IN THE INDUSTRY

Art Director

BEST KNOWN FOR

Nuclear Throne, Sonic Mania,
Sonic Mania Plus and
Cadence of Hyrule:
Crypt of the NecroDancer
Featuring The Legend of Zelda

PAUL VEER

The power behind the Nuclear Throne whose art also helped bring Sonic Mania and Cadence of Hyrule to life!

INTERVIEW BY JONATHAN HOLMES

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2019

NF: What were some of the games that led you to want to become an artist?

PAUL: To be honest, becoming an artist in games was not something that I had always wanted to do. Obviously I liked games as a kid, but it never got to the point where I was like "Oh man YEAH! I can do that! I can draw for games!". For years I was sure that I wanted to make comics, actually. Which is kind of funny, because I'd never really drawn a full comic in my life. But I liked to draw. I drew all the time. So "comics artist" kind of morphed into "I guess I'll go into art school?" when I got older, and then I found out the games branch of the art school I wanted to go to was actually in my hometown. So I figured, "Why not?" and applied. And that's how I got into games. I'd dabbled in pixel art during my high school years, so when the time came to do our first game project in art school and my teammate (Roy de Groot, who also worked with me on various Vlambeer games!) wanted to do a pixel-based game, that's how I really got into pixel art.

Do you remember what it felt like when you first saw your art come to life in a game?

This is something where I think I differ from other developers. You often hear developers describe that moment as something magical. But I think since my mindset from the start was just "I want to draw" it didn't really hit me when stuff started moving in a game. The magic, if you want to call it that, happens earlier for me when I animate the characters. So I guess when I first started learning how to animate properly, that was really cool! That was the moment for me when it felt like I was bringing something to life. Of course implementing it into a game afterwards is still really cool, but at that point I am so familiar with the animations already that it's not as special as when I first started animating.

How did you end up partnering with Vlambeer?

I met both JW and Rami at the same art school I went to. I was in my graduation year when they started, but I ended up hanging out with JW a lot especially. He and I did some game jams together, so we were already familiar with each other's way of working when they started Vlambeer together and asked me to do the animations for Super Crate Box. After that we kind of just kept doing things.

We travelled to various conferences and events and made a ton of games together. Mine and JW's style and pace of making games work quite nicely in tandem, so it always felt natural to just keep making games together over the years. That eventually culminated in Nuclear Throne, which I think you can view as a "best of" kind of game. It has elements of all Vlambeer games, in a way, and was at the time I think the absolute best we could do with the skills we had developed.

Was there a point in your career when you realized that you had really "made it?" If so, is that a feeling that has stuck with you, or is it something you have to reclaim for yourself every time you start a new project?

There are lots of moments that have made me feel like I had at least achieved something. Releasing a game, getting great reviews, sometimes being nominated for some kind of award, seeing people play our game live on stream and having a blast . . . those are all moments where I definitely felt like I had "made it." The biggest ones were obviously being asked to work on a Sonic (Sonic Mania/Mania Plus) and a Zelda (Cadence of Hyrule: Crypt of the NecroDancer Featuring The Legend of Zelda) game. That's a big deal, and something I'm eternally proud of and grateful for!

But I will also always tell myself "OK, so what's next?". I don't mean that in the sense of "How do I top this? What next Big Thing can I work on?" but more literally "What can I do next with the skills I have developed from this previous project?". I want to improve my work, not necessarily become bigger or more well known, and so I try to not latch onto feelings of having "made it." So that it doesn't get to my head and I start to stagnate and just do the same things over and over.

A nice side effect of that is that I never worry about being able to "top my best work" or something, because the focus of every project I take on is to learn something new and get better. Even if the game itself might not be a better game than the last, I will have learned something new — and that to me is more valuable.

So yeah, I guess I try to reclaim that feeling with every project. That's the only way I keep improving if you ask me.

Some people think of pixel art as a style of digital painting, while others

consider it to be an entirely unique medium unto itself. Where do you stand on that question, and why do you think people even ask it in the first place?

I would call pixel art a technique or medium, but I can see where this question comes from. If you look at painting, we call things like expressionism, cubism or surrealism "styles." But the works being created within those styles don't all look exactly the same. They share a common element, but you'll still be able to tell works and artists apart. I think this is what people mean when they call pixel art a "style." They share the common element that the art is made at low resolution, but differences still exist between artists or works. They're not trying to say it all looks the same to them. Just that that common element is there. Or at least, that's how I interpret that particular conversation these days.

For me, when I call pixel art a medium, I say that because things like expressionism or surrealism can exist within pixel art, and there are too many specific techniques to just put it with the rest of digital painting.

Some people say that using pixel art is the cheapest and easiest way to make art for your game, while others say it's the hardest and most costly. From a technical perspective, what are the advantages and disadvantages to making a game with 2D sprites vs. from 3D polygons, and why do you think there are so many varying opinions on how difficult and expensive pixel art is to produce?

I think the advantages that come with pixel art are speed and specific color techniques. Good pixel art obviously takes a long time to make, but in my experience iteration and revisions are still faster in pixel art than they are with higher resolution assets. Because of the size of the assets it's a lot easier to fix simple mistakes. Not a lot of time is spent on redrawing a line or a particular part of a larger sprite, compared to something like a higher resolution 2D game or a 3D model where fixing things might take a bit longer.

The color technique I'm talking about is very specifically working with an indexed palette. The best way to explain this, I think, would be to imagine all the colors of a particular sprite to be laid out in a table or palette. The data for the colors is stored in fixed positions, so if you change the values of the colors to something else, that would be

reflected in the game because the code is referring to those specific positions in the palette to draw the color information from.

An example of this would be when Mega Man charges his Mega Buster. He will flicker in various shades, but this flickering is happening independent of his animations by changing the values of his colors in code every frame, so he can keep moving and jumping while the flickering is happening.

This is useful for two reasons. For one, it lets you do these kind of changes to a sprite at any moment. That way you don't have to ask your artists to draw every animation frame you might need with a different palette. You only need the one sprite and the color information stored in the palette. And it lets you have direct control over individual colors and allows you to change or animate those colors without the rest of the sprite being touched. This is different from applying, say, a hue shift or something to the entire sprite, which would affect all colors on the sprite.

However, some things are harder with pixel art, like doing customizable characters or outfits. This is easier to accomplish with 3D or skeletal-based 2D animation.

As for why there are so many varying opinions on the difficulty of pixel art, I think that comes down to what kind of pixel art you want to do and how skilled the artist is. You see a lot of games come out that utilize more of the stick figure pixel art style popularized by Superbrothers: Swords & Sworcery EP, which is considerably faster to produce than something like Iconoclasts or Owlboy. Those last two come closer to traditional 2D animation, and thus are more difficult and more expensive to produce.

Oh! One more thing that's nice about doing a pixel art game is that pixel art is very small. A lot of assets barely take up more than 5kb, so your game can end up quite compact even with tons and tons of assets!

What do you think of the current split in the fandom over Pokémon Sword & Shield and the development team's decision to limit the total size of the Generation VIII National Dex? Do you think this issue would have still come up if they'd stuck with Generation V's pixel art? Even if that would have fixed the problem, isn't there such a thing as having too many Pokémon in one game?

I think it was bound to happen and they've been wanting to cut down on

the National Dex for years. I don't think it has anything to do with the artwork and the same would have happened if they'd stuck with pixel art. In fact, the pixel art approach might have been even more costly, because they had to do both front- and back-facing sprites of everything, including the animations in Black & White. With the switch to 3D, it allowed them to cut down on that animation workload.

Honestly, I think it has more to do with the obscene amount of programming and balancing that comes with having a lineup of 800+ playable monsters that all fight each other. It might seem simple, because they technically have data from their other games that you'd think they could just move over to a new project, but it's likely not as easy as that sounds. And with there being so many Pokémon that go unused by players, it was only a matter of time before they started culling that number a bit and selecting Pokémon that are the most interesting per region or game.

One argument you hear a lot is that Game Freak should just hire more people, but hiring more people is not necessarily always a solution. That will come with additional project management and having to communicate and explain to more and more people how the game should work and how it should be made, which, unless done particularly well, can also result in the quality going down because of bad management. That's something to consider, especially if that's just not the kind of project size you want as a studio.

You are an old pro now, having witnessed it firsthand as Minecraft went from a weird, independently developed free beta of a game to the biggest mainstream hit in modern history, and as Sans went from a little underground skeleton to an official part of the world of Smash Bros. No matter how you slice it, the line between indie games and AAA games has never been blurrier. How do you define indie in 2019, and how do you think changing concepts of the term have changed how games are made, played and sold? I think it definitely is harder to describe these days, but I also don't think it's really important to make that distinction — at least not for me personally. In the end we all just make games, and recognizing that rather than trying to split up the industry and fight over who is or isn't AAA or indie is a very good thing if you ask me. It feels like it's making collaborations

between individuals/indie developers and larger studios possible and more common. And I don't mean just stuff like Shovel Knight or Undertale being represented in Super Smash Bros. You're seeing a bunch of smaller studios taking on larger franchises nowadays, with games like Wonder Boy: The Dragon's Trap, Cadence of Hyrule, Streets of Rage 4 and River City Girls all happening in the past few years. Or even something like Toby Fox doing the soundtrack for Game Freak's Little Town Hero. I genuinely hope we get to see lots more collaborations like that, and I don't think we would have seen this kind of thing if we'd kept separating AAA and indie.

A lot of artists struggle with work/life balance. They put so much of themselves into their projects that they define their entire identities by them, leading them to personal suffering if their work is criticized, and maybe worse, to even forget who they are outside of the world of their fans and collaborators. Do you have any advice for how young artists should look at themselves, and their work, in a healthier way?

My advice is: Learn how to schedule your day and your projects. Having a schedule or deadline does not limit your creative freedom and in fact will help you in making hard decisions like cutting stuff out of your game or managing the scope of your project. Leave room in your day to do things that are not related to your work. No matter how much you enjoy creating, you will eventually burn out if you do it nonstop. You need breaks in order to recharge, and having a schedule will force you to do so.

This is something that I've done from Day 1. Of course there will be times where you will have to put in a little extra time to get something done, but in general I refuse to work evenings or weekends, even when I am working completely for myself on personal projects. It's not worth it.

Also, related to that: Try not to live solely for your work or your art. Despite what others might tell you, you do not have to create 24/7 or give your entire life to a project to have it succeed or to be valid as an artist. This is something I still struggle with, especially when things like #portfolioday or #artsartist are trending. I usually have nothing to show, and that can make me feel like I am not as valid of an artist as others who draw tons in their free time. But the fact of the matter is I still made stuff for eight hours that day for work. And if that

satisfies my creative needs, then that's all I really need to do, you know?

Now that Cuphead is getting a Netflix cartoon, people are hoping to see more indie games make the jump to films or television. Any thoughts on bringing any of your creations, or the creations of others, to the world of traditional animation? It feels like a Nuclear Throne series is just waiting to happen . . .

Haha, a Nuclear Throne series might be cool! It would have to be subtitled though. I think part of the charm of Nuclear Throne's cast is that they speak their own language, so replacing that with spoken English would take away a bit from the feeling of the Nuclear Throne world. But I'd obviously love to see it. Those characters are still very dear to me, so being able to do more with them would be a lot of fun.

Creations of others, though . . . I'd love to see a Minit series! Where every episode is just a minute long. I think you could do a lot of funny and interesting things with that concept and that kind of pacing!

If you could direct a game in any Nintendo franchise, and you had an unlimited budget, what would you make and why?

I think what people expect me to say here is Kirby, and while I wouldn't say no to that, I think HAL already makes

exactly the kind of Kirby game I'd like to see, so there's not much room for me to really direct there.

One thing I've been thinking about a bit lately is a Wario RPG. I love the Wario Land series and am somewhat disappointed that Wario has become more associated with the WarioWare games instead. So I'd love to bring this other, more forgotten side of Wario back. Doing it in an RPG format would, I think, also make more room to really flesh out the world, much like the Paper Mario and Mario & Luigi games, because there's more room for storytelling and dialogue than in a standard platformer. I think that'd be a great format to expand on the Wario Land world and bring it back into the spotlight.

Some other franchises I'd love to have a go at are Drill Dozer and Dillon's Rolling Western/Dead Heat Breakers. Dillon is my favorite new IP from Nintendo in recent years. The character designs are amazing! So I'd love to bring that into 2D and do something cool with it.

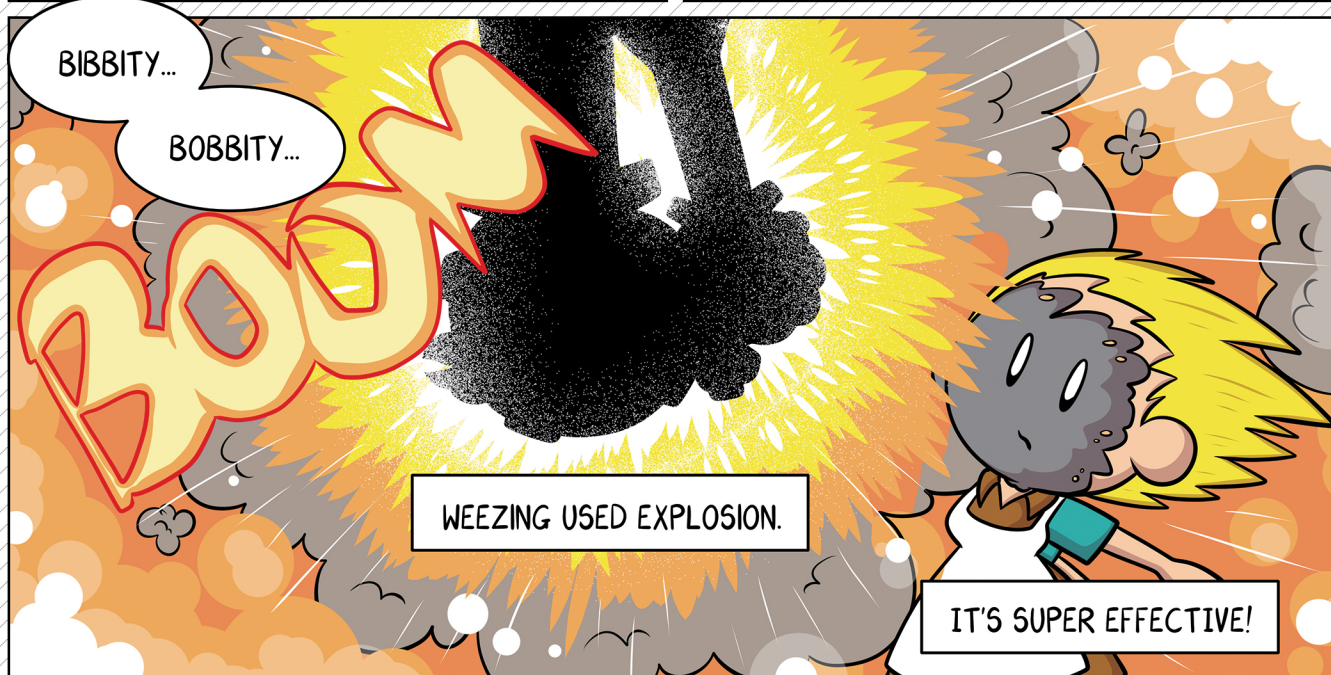
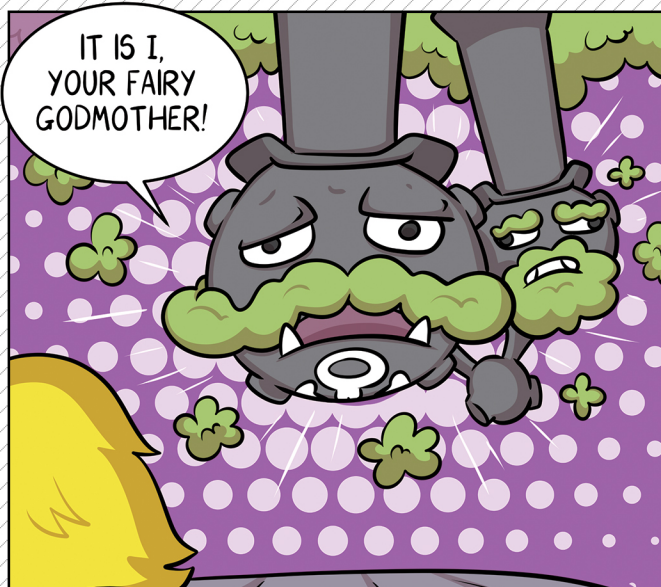
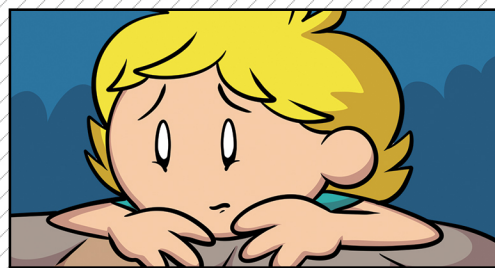
Finally, if you could have any superpower, what would it be and why? Teleportation or instant transmission. I moved halfway across the world, away from my family, and I have lots of close friends spread all over the world. Being able to teleport to see them would make life a whole lot easier.



NUCLEAR THRONE

Before working on the Sonic and Zelda franchises, Paul was the lead artist on Nuclear Throne, a wholly original title from Vlambeer. Like Sonic, the game features a cast of cute-but-radical cartoon misfits up against a massive army of altered beasts and robotic monstrosities. Like Cadence of Hyrule, it's a top-down action/exploration game that requires lightning-quick reflexes to master.

Development of Nuclear Throne was often streamed live, giving players a hands-on role in development and a firsthand look at Paul's artistic process!





RETRO



DUX

:L15

HP:

34 / 45

DUX

used CUT!

THE LEGEND OF DUX

POKÉMON
RED & BLUE
GAME BOY, 1998

For aging Pokémon fans (like yours truly) who have followed the franchise since its beginning back in the '90s, one of the most exciting reveals for Sword & Shield has been Sirfetch'd – the long-awaited evolution of Farfetch'd! This leek-wielding warrior bird became a fan favorite all the way back in Pokémon Red & Blue, and all thanks to one member of the species in particular: Dux! Farfetch'd couldn't be found in the wild in those first adventures, so the only way to add one to your team was to trade a Spearow with an NPC. And the one you got back? Well, it was named Dux . . . and you couldn't change that name! So good old Dux was recruited over and over again by millions of Game Boy gamers over two decades ago, forming the foundation of a Farfetch'd fandom that has waited for an evolution for soooo long! Well done, Dux! You finally did it! – LUCAS



CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF THE WIZARD

A defense of the film that's been dismissed for too long as just a 100-minute ad.

ON DECEMBER 15, 1989, the most ambitious and incredible spectacle of extreme product placement in the history of the video game industry opened in theaters across the United States: the 100-minute Nintendo advertisement that was *The Wizard*. With horrible acting, terrible cinematography and . . .

. . . You know what? No. I don't think so.

This December marks 30 years since *The Wizard* debuted, yes, but more than that, it marks 30 years since nearly every writer who's ever tried to tackle the task of breaking it down has just attempted to outdo everyone who tried before with more and more hyperbole and grandiose overexaggerations. It's been

three decades of one-upmanship, piling on more and more negativity on this one old film to such a degree that the legend of the absolute trainwreck of *The Wizard* has extended insanely far beyond the bounds of what was just meant to be a family film that happened to have video games involved as one piece of a complex plot. If you'd like more of that schlock, any quick Google search will pull up plenty of retrospectives on the movie skewering it again and again.

I won't contribute to that pile.

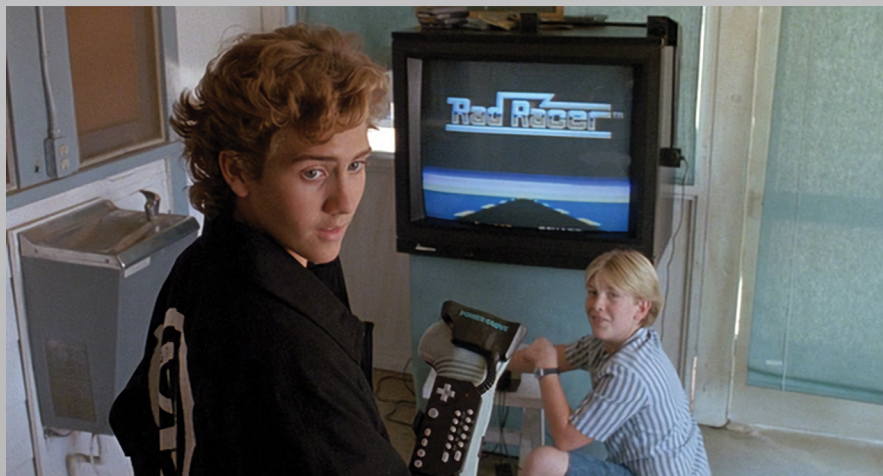
Rather, let's take the opportunity of *The Wizard*'s 30th anniversary to look back on it with more of an open mind, shall we?

The Wizard opens with a scene of a young boy walking along the side of a desert highway alone. He seems aimless; wandering — he carries nothing but a lunchbox and when a policeman stops to pick him up, he forlornly looks to the horizon and simply says, "California." This is Jimmy Woods. Later on he'll come to be known as the titular "Wizard" for his remarkable skills at playing video games, but games have no part in the setup to this story. Rather, Jimmy is introduced as a troubled, traumatized kid who spends his days stacking blocks in a school for children with special needs . . . when he's not wandering right out the door of said school and taking off walking with no adult supervision, that is.

The frequency with which Jimmy somehow evades the notice of the grown-ups who are supposed to be watching him becomes so severe that his mother and stepfather decide to send him to a special "home" for mentally disturbed kids, and that's the straw that breaks the camel's back for his older half-brother, Corey, who gets fed up that nobody but him seems to care about Jimmy any more. Corey breaks Jimmy out of the care facility and the two brothers set out on a hitchhiking quest to California. (For seemingly no reason at first, other than Jimmy's vague desire to want to go there and Corey's desire to both free his brother and travel to exotic places.)

Again, no video games involved up to this point. If *The Wizard* were the wall-to-wall product placement nightmare that so many have tried to claim it is, don't you think we'd have had Mario in our faces from the very first scene? No, they enter the narrative to serve the story that's already been established, as Corey happens to notice Jimmy rack up an impressive high score on *Double Dragon* at a bus station, then the brothers challenge a girl who's there, Haley, to try to beat his point total in order to win money off of her to buy a bus ticket. Jimmy wins, of course, and Haley joins the wandering boys to give their journey some much-needed guidance and a concrete final destination to reach: a gaming tournament called Video Armageddon that's taking place in Los Angeles soon.

And so it is that the road map for our road trip tale is fully sketched out, and *The Wizard* follows the beats you'd expect from there. Our trio of heroes makes consistent progress toward Los Angeles while using Jimmy's incredible video game skills to hustle older kids and cocky adults for cash along the way, and a sub-plot follows Jimmy and Corey's father Sam and oldest brother Nick as they try to track down the missing boys and clash against a bounty hunter hired to do the same. Video games are woven into several scenes throughout the middle of the movie, and this is where most of the product placement is to be found. I assert that the hyperbole surrounding these moments has been too extreme, but they are there.



Let's review them in degrees of severity, shall we? At the lowest end of in-your-faceness are a few brief glimpses of arcade cabinets appearing on-screen for just a few seconds — they could have been fixated on longer, but the story moved right along. Another moment has Haley mention that she bought Jimmy "some Power magazines" to teach him helpful tips and tricks — but Nintendo Power actually isn't used in that split-second scene. I went back and watched it frame by frame to be sure, but the prop used was actually the June 1989 issue of Video Games & Computer Entertainment. Why wouldn't Nintendo have pushed a copy of NP into that scene and had the camera linger on its cover for a while?

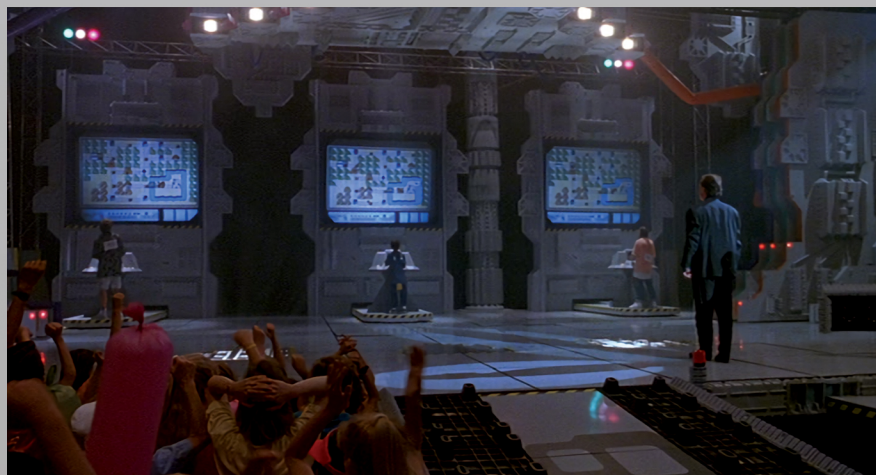
More outright — and what I'm willing to label as pure advertising — is when Nick discovers an old NES in the back of Sam's pick-up truck and the two of them both get addicted to hooking it up to every TV they come across in hotels, auto repair shops and more to play the likes of Super Mario Bros. 2, Zelda II and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. (I think saving the princess can wait when you literally need to be saving your sons, Sam.)

The Power Glove scene? I have to discuss that, as it's the most memorable and in-your-face ad moment in the movie. The heroic trio encounters a smug, self-satisfied gamer named Lucas (yes, I know), and he intimidates them by strapping on a Power Glove and running through a flawless round of Rad Racer. He puts the cherry on top of his perfect performance with the endlessly quoted line: "I love the Power Glove. It's so bad."

And finally, Video Armageddon itself. The climax of the film takes place on an elaborate stage built at Universal Studios in Hollywood, and after a frightening flight away from the pursuing bounty hunter that weaves in and out of backstage areas at the theme park, Jimmy goes head-to-head against Lucas in a score attack challenge on . . . "Super Mario Bros. 3!!!" This was the hypest moment for kids sitting in those theater seats 30 years ago (my 8-year-old self among them), as Super Mario Bros. 3 had been teased in various American video game magazines throughout the preceding year, but it hadn't yet gone on sale in the States. It ended up being released in February 1990, two months after *The Wizard*, which was just oh-so-perfect timing. I was all-in on SMB3 excitement for those two in-between months and couldn't wait to buy my copy of that NES cartridge . . . the advertising worked perfectly on little Lucas.

But in the 30 years since, as I've watched *The Wizard* over again once every few years or so, I've come to appreciate its heart much more. Yes, there are flaws in the film (I get bugged that the game audio never syncs up with the video being displayed, personally), but especially now as a father with sons of my own, I can appreciate the story the director was fighting to tell around all the gaming scenes. That director, Todd Holland, has discussed in interviews over the years how dismissive Universal was of the entire project — they simply wanted a 100-minute video game commercial. He fought and clawed to get the emotional heart of Jimmy's journey in place, though, and I feel like he succeeded. A broken family has experienced a terrible loss, and in coming back together to reconnect with one another, some games happen to be there. That works for me.

If you'd like to draw your own conclusions, a 30th Anniversary Blu-ray release goes on sale in February. If you watch it, go in with an open mind! — LUCAS



WARP ZONE

What Nintendo Power was writing about way back when.

THE BEAST WAS BACK.

November 1994's issue of Nintendo Power started off strong with a cover not only featuring the holiday hit Donkey Kong Country, but also boasting a chance to win a Killer Instinct arcade machine of your very own. A 10-page feature nearly as big as the prime primate himself carried the label of "Donkey Kong Country Exposed," tying it in to the video cassette that was making the rounds to lucky subscribers' mailboxes at the time (see sidebar).

Joining the King of Swing was Konami's rocket knight adventure known as Sparkster, the enigmatic Earthworm Jim (sharing poster duties with the Ghosts 'n Goblins spin-off and Gargoyle's Quest sequel, Demon's Crest), the third numbered Final Fantasy in the West (or sixth, if you're in Japan), Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures, Wild Snake, Super Adventure Island II and a whole new Sports Round-Up. Game Boy saw lots of action, but only one game in Contra: The Alien Wars, an 8-bit port of the 16-bit Super NES shoot-'em-up.

Special features abounded as well, with a Mortal Kombat II blowout in Classified Information giving the special moves and "finishing moves" for every character, plus instructions for how to fight the three hidden characters, both bosses (minus the grind of going through everyone else first) and a few other goodies as well. Elsewhere was a guide for how to "laugh in the ugly faces" of the bosses of Illusion of Gaia, plus a couple of pages dedicated to playing 16-bit Space Invaders with a simple Game Boy Space Invaders cartridge and a Super Game Boy (plus a Super NES, naturally).

The biggest feature of all, though, was the four pages of Killer Instinct 101, showing off the character art rendered on Silicon Graphics, Inc. workstations and teaching you everything you need to know about combination moves and the art of "auto-seconds." And as promised, those up to the challenge had a chance to win their own K.I. arcade machine via this month's Player's Poll contest, while five runners-up would receive \$25 in quarters to play it at their arcade — ideally while sporting the

ISSUE #66: NOVEMBER 1994



ISSUE #67: DECEMBER 1994



SPATIAL EFFECTS

"IN YOUR FACE GRAPHICS:"

How would you like to meet Wario in person, face-to-face, eye-to-eye? This kind of personal contact will be possible with the VR 32. The 32-bit processor scales the detailed images like the one in this computer art with such smoothness and speed that you'll think it's really moving toward you.



Our artist's conception below, a first-person perspective on the VR 32, may seem surreal with its faceless people, but the reality will certainly exceed all our fantasies. The first games we saw included one boxing demo from this perspective. The dodging and punching were similar to Super Punch-Out!, but the depth was at arm's length.

One of the coolest parts of having a system provide such incredible 3-D is that you can create so many new perspectives. Moving around the world in a smoothly scrolling first-person perspective may be the most immersive technique. Current games like Doom that create worlds in this perspective have proven to be incredibly popular. But with the VR 32, the perspective and speed of scrolling will raise this kind of game to a new level of excitement. Beyond first person perspectives, though, the VR 32 excels at other effects, like characters scaling quickly to huge proportions as they rush at you out of the 3-D distance. If you like a little punch in your games, the VR 32 can provide the glove, the fist, and the right hook.



K.I. caps and medallions they'd also win, straight from the Power Supplies catalog.

In Top 20 land, the last Metroid may have been in captivity, but Super Metroid was on the loose at #1, followed by the rookie Super Street Fighter II and veteran The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past. Zelda was running hot on the 8-bit side of things, too, with the original and Link's Awakening taking the top spots on their respective platforms. Wario Land and Donkey Kong made respectable second and third place showings on Game Boy, while Super Mario Bros. 3 just couldn't be held down on NES, even as Mega Man 6 took the #3 spot.

Closing things out in Pak Watch, Simba couldn't wait to be king, but he had to settle for The Lion King on Super NES being the headliner. Sneak peeks were also given to Aero the Acrobat 2, Top Gear 3000 (2000 was so last millennium), C2: Judgment Clay, NHL '95 and NBA Jam for Game Boy. The Pak Watch Update also revealed that Ruby-Spears' Mega Man cartoon was now on the air, a glimpse at the Catapult XBAND modem for Super NES, a heap of helping of X-Men titles from Capcom and a tease of Nintendo's mysterious new "VR 32," with a preview to follow next time.

While Donkey Kong stole the spotlight in November, December's cover revealed that the NP crew wasn't done with Earthworm Jim just yet. Eight pages of cow-launching, crow-blasting tips 'n tricks were joined by Demon's Crest, Zero the Kamikaze Squirrel, Super Return of the Jedi, Rockstar North's (née DMA Design) Uniracers and North America's exclusive Super Scope/Super NES Mouse game, Tin Star. Plus, not one, but two Mickey Mouse games filled out a "Mickey-o-rama" feature with Capcom's sequel to Disney's Magical Quest, The Great Circus Mystery Starring Mickey & Minnie, as well as Sony Imagesoft's Mickey Mania.

For fans of 8-bit, the Game Boy got SNK's Samurai Shodown, Casino Funpak and the unusual crossover of Wario and Bomberman in Wario Blast. Speaking of Wario, he marked the end of an era alongside Toad, as Wario's Woods was released as the final licensed game in North America for the system that brought Nintendo to prominence, the NES.

Other special features included the Final Fantasy III Special, a 12-page conclusion of that game's coverage. A further two pages highlighted the Frame It Contest Winners, with one Clark Otto of Sankville, Wisconsin stealing the show with an entire page of Super Mario Land 2 borders all to himself.

As teased in the previous issue, the biggest highlight of this year-end edition was the first in-depth look at VR 32 – Nintendo's 32-bit virtual reality machine that would ultimately go on to be known as the Virtual Boy. This preview was early enough that no actual games were shown, nor the unit itself. Until they could lay all their cards on the table, Nintendo Power used computer-generated visuals and lots of descriptive text to try to convey the sense of depth players would behold when using the device, and what it could do for gameplay experiences.

Winners of this month's Player's Poll not only received a copy of Activision's Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure for the Super NES, but also got a trip to explore ancient Mayan ruins in the Yucatan jungles!

Finally, Pak Watch closed things out with looks at Mega Man X2, Kirby's Dream Course, Wolverine: Adamantium Rage, Jurassic Park 2 and the perfect end for any sentence, DOOM. — DAVID



THE ORIGINAL NINTENDO DIRECT NINTENDO'S FIRST VHS PROMO

Stop me if you've heard this one: In 1994, the Internet was nowhere near as widespread as it is today, and Nintendo had a hot new hit on its hands with Donkey Kong Country and its mind-blowing graphics. Seeing is believing, and for once, print just simply was not enough to convey what they had in store for Power Players that holiday season. So, what to do? Make a VHS video cassette that let customers see the glory and splendor of DKC in action with their own eyes, then mail it out to thousands of subscribers (including yours truly, who still has his), of course!

In the video, comedian/host Josh Wolf takes us to Nintendo of America for a behind-the-scenes look at how this incarnation of Donkey Kong came to be. Along the way, he talks to folks such as Ken Lobb, Tony Harman, Dan Owsen and George Zachary from Silicon Graphics, and even places a long-distance phone call out to Twycross, England, to speak with Tim Stamper and find out how they made everything look and move so realistically.

Over the course of the video, they explain the new story for DK, introduce his new cast of co-stars, show off a unique computer animation, reveal the "Goodies" (a.k.a. Animal Buddies), play some music (while pitching the soundtrack CD) and, of course, show off lots of gameplay. Throw in some wacky visual filters, a guy in a Donkey Kong costume, some rock and dance music, a million jump cuts and bananas everywhere you look, and you've got a production that could only have been made in the '90s.

Even beyond seeing how DKC came together, the video was a treat for Nintendo fans like nothing else before it, delivering an elusive look inside the company's North American headquarters. From fan art adorning the walls to the World of Nintendo employee store, a Treehouse (so named for this very game) still in its infancy, all the way to Café Mario – the on-premises cafeteria where the Pros could dine on cream of banana soup and peanut butter & banana sandwiches.

And at the very end, when everything there was to say about DKC had been said, there was one final peek behind closed doors (literally) at an upcoming "Killer" title from Rare and Nintendo. (What in the world could that be!?)

While viewing Donkey Kong Country Exposed in its original format has become increasingly difficult over the years, there's no need to worry, as several folks have thankfully uploaded the full contents on the Internet. The only thing you'll be missing is the leaf-covered sleeve with Donkey Kong sitting in the corner!





DEBATE

IT'S A POKÉDEX CONTROVERSY!

JONATHAN VS.
LINDSEY VS. MATTHEW L. VS. THOR

FOR THE FIRST time ever in a mainline series sequel, Pokémon Sword & Shield will not allow players to actually "catch 'em all." Because not every past Pokémon will appear in the new Galar region! Were you offended by this announcement, as many longtime fans were? Or do you find yourself feeling sympathetic toward the developers at Game Freak, and you're ready to come to their defense?

Let's debate!

THOR

I have to be honest — I was more than a little disappointed when I learned that the complete Pokédex would not be available in Pokémon Sword and Pokémon Shield. I've been playing Pokémon since the beginning, and one of my favorite aspects of the game is being able to import characters from past generations to battle and complete the Pokédex. I am very much a completionist, and not being able to bring the whole family over irks me. I understand the pressure Game Freak is under to complete the game's development, but I would have rather waited as long as they needed to provide a complete experience than miss out on traveling with my beloved Darkrai!

MATTHEW L.

Personally, I've never been sold on Game Freak's formula of simply chucking new Pokémon into each flagship game without exploring what they've already got. I love seeing existing Pokémon in new scenarios, such as the red Gyarados in Gold & Silver, which could easily have been a wholly new Pokémon instead.

Pokémon game development becomes more onerous with every generation. I can't begrudge them the decision to scale back and tell a more focused story rather than trying to include nearly a thousand playable characters and not being able to do any of them justice.

I completely understand why this makes people upset. I remember being extremely frustrated when Ruby & Sapphire similarly didn't include a bunch of my favorites from the first two generations. A year later with the release of FireRed & LeafGreen, this

complaint stopped being relevant. I get the feeling the current Pokédex controversy will blow over with time as well.

JONATHAN

Matt and Thor, you're like the angel on one of my shoulders, and the devil on the other. Do I want to be kind or cruel to Pokémon Sword & Shield? I think it's a question a lot of people are asking. The series and its players are at a crossroads, and anyone who is invested in the franchise feels torn — myself included. Not only did I spend years writing, drawing and voicing a semi-successful M-rated Pokémon parody cartoon, but back in 2011, after years of pacing through tall grass and at least one elaborate scheme involving Nintendo of Europe, my 70-year-old uncle and an immigrant Deoxys, I was also able to finally catch them all.

At first, it was a thrill! But after a day or two, I felt a little hollow. Like Gollum after he finally got his *precious* back from Frodo, my obsessive gathering impulses were finally satiated. The good news is, I didn't fall into a volcano. The bad news is, with my urge to collect satisfied at last, I was able to step back and ask myself a question: Was my ability to assemble an army of over 500 virtual pets a testament to my patience, persistence and problem-solving skills, or was it just a symptom of my mind being hijacked by a multi-million dollar corporation? Sadly, the answer was "yes" on both counts.

In the DSM-V (the manual of psychiatric and behavioral illnesses), Hoarding Disorder is defined as "Persistent difficulty discarding or parting with possessions, regardless of their actual value." It's a mentality that The Pokémon Company has fostered in players from the start, and now, they are finally suffering some consequences for that. "Dexit" is an outrage because Anti-Dexiters have been bred with the wrong values. Few people get angry if the newest Zelda game fails to carry over all of the items from the last, and no one will be upset if they discover that the next mainline Mario title won't feature each and every transformation from Odyssey. That's because

people value how you play those games, and not just how many things (or in this case, little fantasy animals) that you can acquire in them.

With Sword & Shield, The Pokémon Company is rejecting that notion. They must believe that their game is so fun that it won't need to rely on patronage from high-level Pokémon hoarders to succeed. I'm not so sure they can pull it off, though. If this latest entry becomes a critical and commercial high-water mark for the series, as *Breath of the Wild* and *Smash Bros.* Ultimate are tracking to become for their respective franchises, then maybe the full National Dex will be gone for good — but c'mon now. Pokémon fans have been trained to catch them all for most of their lives. Their completionist stats have been maxed out for years. It's hard to imagine that they would want to fully unlearn moves like "Stockpile" and "Amass" now...

LINDSEY

You're right that people won't complain about a *Zelda* or *Mario* game doing away with old mechanics, but still, those aren't the same type of game. Most games are a self-contained experience. Pokémon has almost always encouraged trading individual creatures from one game to the next. This feature has been used in promotions for years, with event Pokémon being used almost like exclusive merch. I for one have always taken advantage of this! I've transferred a ton of Pokémon from my older games, and I always help out my friends by trading them Pokémon with special abilities. Before the Pokédex cut hit the news, I was even catching a whole slew of Shinies to trade up and give away. Now I won't be able to freely trade as I please, and it really bums me out.

But this does raise an interesting question: Would there ever be merit to cutting the National Dex? I think there would, actually! A series can really benefit from being completely reinvented, and Pokémon is no exception. For ages, trainers have wanted a truly open-world Pokémon experience. To have a wide variety of Pokémon to ride, to have a huge map to explore and for all of it to happen in real time.

However, such a thing would be a monumental undertaking for any development team, especially if they have to factor in over 1,000 Pokémon.

If such a game were to be developed, I'd actually prefer a near-total Dex cut. I'd want Game Freak to be able to focus on creating an entirely new Pokédex and to make sure all of the new Pokémon work as mounts, scent trackers, messengers, whatever! The way I see it, I'd want an entirely new cast of Pocket Monsters. Let's call them "The New 151" . . . oh, and add in the Pikachu line on top of that, since Pikachu's not going anywhere. The New 151 + Pikachu would have fully animated mobility: running, swimming, flying, climbing. Whatever their species could realistically do, they can do it! You could explore the whole world with your team by your side. Perhaps some Pokémon could point you in the direction of useful items and resources, while others could protect the team from harsh weather. Every single Pokémon would have lively, unique animations and could even emotionally react to different situations, growling at threats or cowering in the presence of strong foes.

This would still be an enormous project and it would take several years to complete, even with a huge development team. But by completely revamping the Pokédex, each monster would be given the love and care it deserves. And I'd completely welcome that!

. . . Unfortunately, Pokémon are just being cut without any major changes to the world or gameplay. Sure, there are times when cutting the Dex would make sense, but right now it feels like a huge downgrade.

JONATHAN

I agree that this was not the way to start cutting the National Dex. The way that the news was initially swept under the rug just made fans even more upset — like finding out that your boss had secretly cut your pay instead of calling you into the office to apologize and explain first. The difference is, we weren't told that we shouldn't complain because we still have money in the bank. We were told we still have the Pokémon Bank to rely on and should be happy with that! Clearly, that isn't enough for a lot of people.

Weighing the merits of The Pokémon Company's decisions all boils down to if players feel cared about or not. A good publisher always works to make all their customers feel acknowledged and valued, and I think we can all agree that Nintendo and The Pokémon Company have dropped the ball there with Sword & Shield. If they had made it so you could transfer all your old Pokémon to this new game, but had some in-game excuse for why you couldn't use all of them in battle, like an allergy to the air in the new environment, I bet that would have done a lot to soften the blow. Realistically, most people don't want to use all 1,000 or so currently existing Pokémon in the same game. Even if they only used each one for a single minute, that's still over 15 hours of total time spent playing with different Pokémon! People may think they want that, but in reality, they probably wouldn't bother.

As for your "New 151 + Pikachu" idea, I love it, but then again, I loved Pokémon Black & White, which essentially tried for the same thing, except it allowed

you to transfer all your old Pokes over later on. Yet the game is among the worst-selling entries in the main franchise, with many complaining that they didn't like the new Pokémon designs and that they just wanted their old favorites back. This feedback may have been what led the next game in the series, Pokémon X & Y, to add fewer new Pokémon to the mix than ever before. So I'm not sure how well people would take to an open-world game with mostly new Pokémon. Like I was saying, The Pokémon Company has conditioned players to value past Pokémon in an intense, borderline hoarding way. Personally, I always want the new games I buy to offer as much new content as possible. If I wanted old content, I'd just play the old games — but I'm not a typical Pokémon fan. Pokémon GO is the most popular game in the series history, and in over three years, it's only offered a total of two new Pokémon.

It makes me wonder if the wisest move would be to stop expanding the National Dex entirely, and instead just have each new mainline entry go all-out with new forms for everybody. That might be the best way to please everyone — or almost everyone. At this point, the Pokémon series defines itself by putting a new spin on old themes over and over again. They might as well go all the way with it now, and if they are upfront about that decision from the start, I think the players will accept it.

I guess in my mind, I'm already expecting Sword & Shield to sell even worse than Black & White, and for The Pokémon Company to have to try something radically different for Generation IX. It just doesn't seem possible that this isn't going to backfire for them.

MATTHEW L.

Personally, I wish the National Dex had stopped expanding a long time ago. There are a lot of what I would call *filler* Pokémon, which simply exist to tick boxes. See, for example, all the different off-brand Pikachu clones we've seen over the years.

Will Sword & Shield sell poorly? I doubt it — as the first main series games (Let's Go remakes aside) on the Switch, they'll appeal to both home console and handheld enthusiasts. To a certain extent, these games don't need to rock the boat in order to exist, so long as they deliver the core Pokémon experience.

I suppose Game Freak feels like dramatic innovation is an unnecessary risk. The core Pokémon experience is as fun today as it was 20 years ago, and every time an older fan of the series grows tired of the well-worn formula, a youngster will play their first game in the series and get hooked. Why mess with success when Pokémon is already perfect?

To that end, I still feel like trimming the fat is the best thing for the Pokémon games. We don't need Plusle and Minun and Pachirisu and Emolga and Dedenne. We don't need half a dozen different pigeon Pokémon.

I appreciate that every Pokémon is somebody's favorite. Alas, disappointing people will be inevitable for the sake of a tighter gaming experience. I personally really love Lilligant, for example, but I'm not going to be offended if it goes missing for a single game.

Trying things like Nuzlocke runs, in which you can only catch the first Pokémon you come across on

every route, often helps players to meet new favorites. Similarly, I really liked the fact that Black & White forced players to try something different and build a team out of entirely new Pokémon.

Mixing things up by trying different Pokémon can be fun. Given how formulaic these games have become, it's no bad thing if we're forced to move outside our comfort zones.

THOR

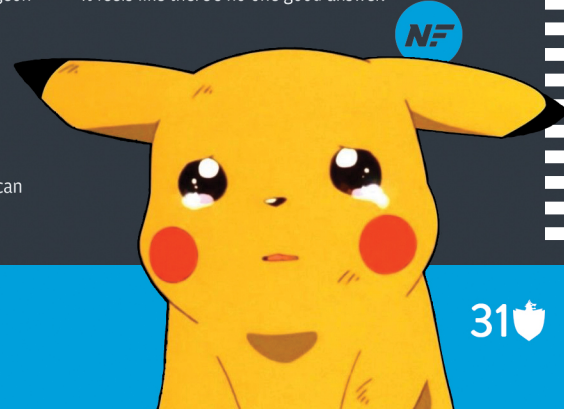
While I do agree there are a number of duplicate monsters throughout the Pokédex, I don't necessarily agree with "trimming the fat," especially on a permanent basis for whatever new region is introduced. Locking away the Zigzaggoons and Scatterbugs of the world until the main story is completed, as was done in Black & White (and in a way the original Ruby & Sapphire), is the best way to handle this in my opinion.

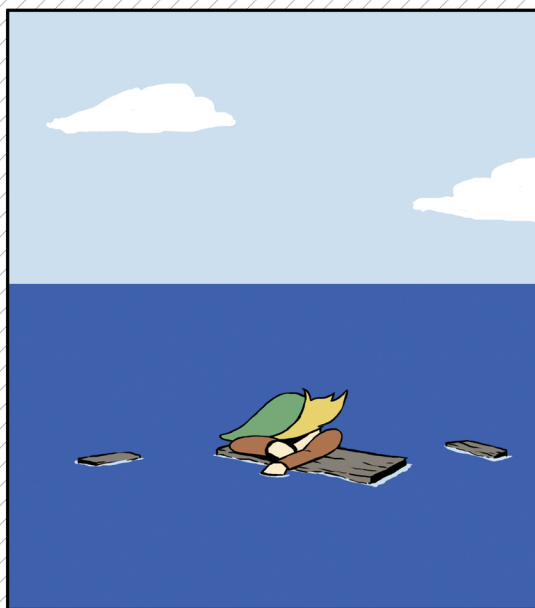
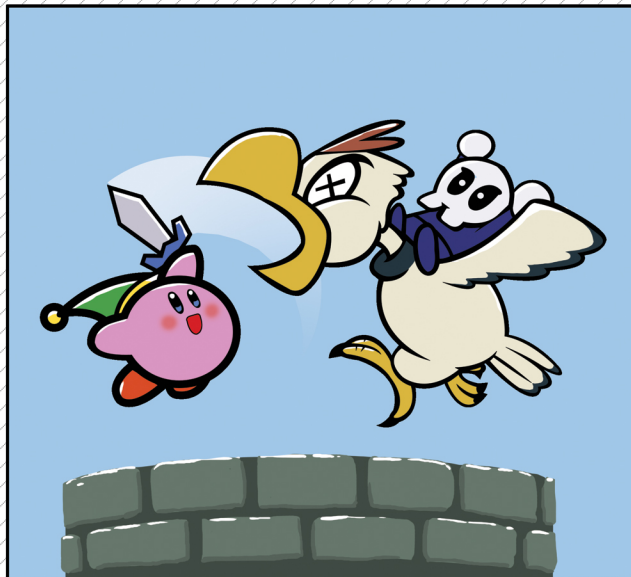
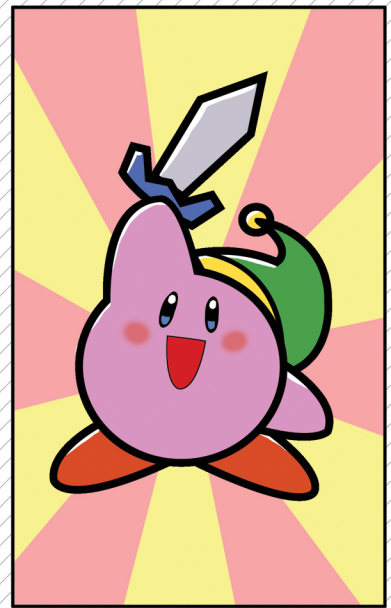
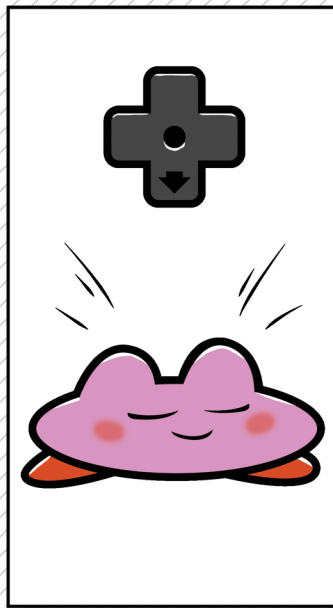
No longer expanding the Pokédex isn't a viable option either, as one of the main selling points of a new game are all the new Pokémon that are introduced. We all love to see new Gym Leaders and new game mechanics, but we're really all here for the new 'mons! It also wouldn't make sense to go into a new region and see exactly the same guys you encountered before and completely disregard the scientific fact that different areas of the world encourage different directions for evolution. Imagine going to an Australia-themed region and not encountering anything inspired by the creatures that live there. Personally I would be disappointed if I didn't see at least four different giant Bug-type monsters make their debut! Each region has its own Pikachu variant because of the differing environments, and ones that aren't as popular as the original shouldn't be discounted just because they're seen as unnecessary duplicates.

LINDSEY

Matthew does have a point though; making a game is much more involved and complicated than a lot of fans realize. Coming up with a new Pokémon game isn't just a matter of importing old Pokémon and adding some new ones. The entire Dex has to deal with new moves, new abilities, new *hidden* abilities, breeding compatibility . . . the list goes on and on. The games have always had balance issues, and testing them for new problems when you have so many new factors can be a huge drain on development time. If not a Dex cut, then what could be done to ease the pressure?

Personally I'd rather simply steer the series away from the "one major release per year" business model The Pokémon Company currently uses. But beyond that, what could we encourage them to do? It feels like there's no one good answer.





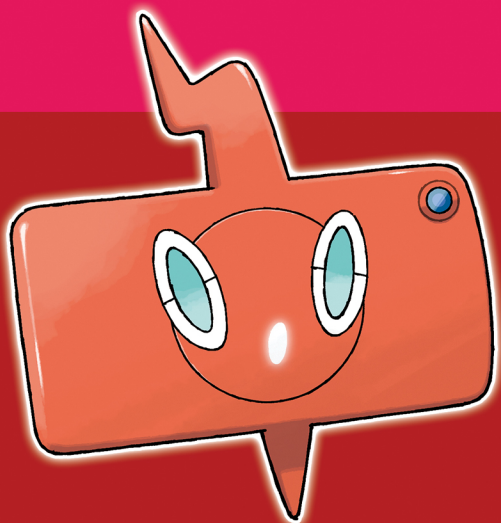


FEATURES



**BIGGER
THAN EVER BEFORE**

BY LUCAS M. THOMAS



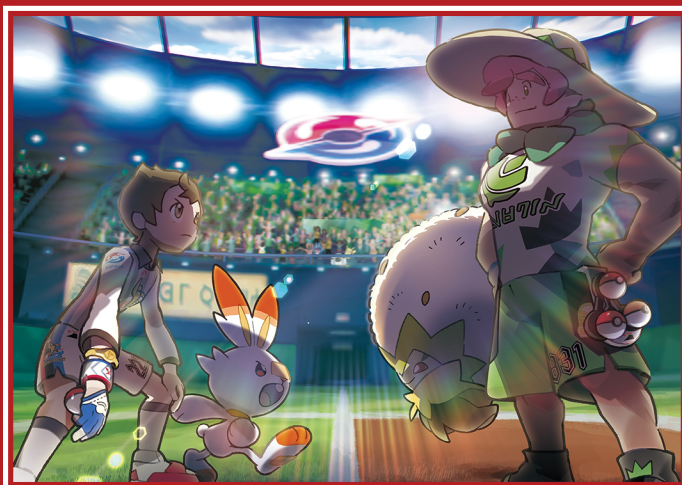
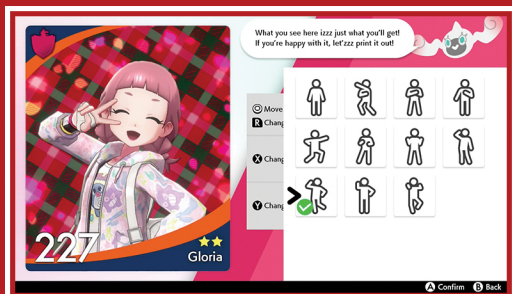
MORE CHOICES THAN EVER BEFORE

Trainer customization has been amped up!

POKÉMON'S GOING BIG! After decades of sequels appearing entirely on portable platforms, the mainline Pokémon RPG series is finally coming to a console — and Game Freak's been doing their best to pack this package with more features than in any past installment, making *Sword & Shield* bigger than ever before! We'll hit the highlights of the biggest additions here in this final look at the games just before their launch on November 15.

... Starting with the expanded array of Trainer customization options! Before you ever lay eyes on a Pokémon, you'll of course first meet your new self in *Sword & Shield*! You'll have more options for skin tone, hairstyles, clothing and accessories than ever before, helping you to differentiate yourself from the friends you'll meet up with to trade and battle.

One accessory every Trainer will have in common, though? The new Rotom Phone, with more capabilities than the Rotom Dex!



THE LARGEST LEAGUE

Gyms galore!

IN OUR LAST issue we discussed how the *Sword and Shield* versions will each have their own paths to progress through the main story, using the example that in *Pokémon Sword* you'll face off against the Fighting-type Gym Leader Bea, while in *Pokémon Shield* that same point in the story will present a battle against the Ghost-type Gym Leader, Allister. Since then, The Pokémon Company has commented on that aspect of the Galar region further, revealing that, for the first time ever, there are Gyms for all 18 different Pokémon types!

Now, before you get too overstimulated, you won't face all 18 in the story of

Sword & Shield. The main tale seems to still involve challenging just eight of them to earn your way to the final face-off at the end of the journey. Going with the sports parallels they've put in place by having Gym Battles take place inside soccer stadiums, you can think of it like eight Gyms being in the major leagues, while the remaining 10 fill out the minors. But constant competition sees the lower-ranking Gyms always trying to push their way to the top!

Perhaps if the games don't go into too much detail with this from a gameplay perspective, extended media like the anime could tackle it. I just hope we get to finally see and challenge a Dark-type Gym!





GO CAMPING!

More bonding opportunities than ever before.

OK, SO HOW many hundreds of times did the old episodes of the anime start off with a scene of Ash and his friends camping out somewhere in the wilderness? He'd be training with Pikachu and whichever set of other monsters he had on hand at the moment, Brock would be there cooking up something for everyone to eat, Team Rocket would probably show up in some kind of giant robot to try to kidnap Pikachu for the millionth time. Good times. Good times.

But now, those kinds of wholesome scenes can finally play out for you and your own Pokémon! Sword & Shield are introducing the "Pokémon Camp" feature — it's an optional diversion from the business of the main quest in which you can kick back, relax with your Pokémon and cook up some curry.

Wait, curry? Yes, just like the series featured macarons while in the France-inspired Kalos region and malasadas in the Hawaii-based islands of Alola (again, mostly in the anime), the developers have taken note of another local food favorite and decided that the tastes of United Kingdom residents are best represented by tons of different varieties of curry. Apparently curry is very popular in Great Britain! I didn't know!

Cooking curry will involve motion control with a Joy-Con controller, as will playing around with your Pokémon one-on-one as you wield a little wand with a bell on it. Will the gameplay boosts you earn from these activities be worth the investment of your time? Maybe, maybe not. But Pokémon Camp will feature a lot of unique character animations too!



THE BREADTH OF THE WILD

Pokémon takes a step into open-world!

PROBABLY THE BIGGEST of big new additions in Sword & Shield — certainly from the perspective of its possible impact on the design of future sequels in the series — is the new Wild Area. This massive open-world zone runs through a huge swath in the middle of the Galar region map, and it's said to be about the same size as two of the regions featured in that big Zelda game from a few years ago. (I can't recall the name. You remember the one.)

Fans have been clamoring for Pokémon to embrace an open-world design, and while the Wild Area represents only one part of the Sword & Shield experience, it is a step in that direction. Some Xenoblade influence is apparently also in the mix, as it's said that you'll be able to stumble into some parts of the Wild Area that are inhabited by Pokémon with insanely high levels way before you're ready to face such fearsome foes. I, for one, can't wait to get chased down and crushed by a Level 83 Snorlax when I've only got a Level 9 Wooloo to protect me!





GROOKEY

This rhythmic monkey serves as the series' latest Grass-type starter. Will it get into a groove with you?



SCORBUNNY

A rapid running rabbit whose feet literally burst into flame from the speed of its sprints. The Fire starter!



SOBBLE

Often sad and sullen, this Water-type starter might prefer to stay home and hide rather than go traveling!



WOOLOO

THE MIGHTIEST OF FLOOFS!! What wonders await those Trainers who surround themselves with Wooloo wool!

NEW 'MONS

Have a look at a handful of Galar region natives!

THOUGH YOU WON'T find every past Pokémon from every old region in the wilds of Galar, the overall total number of monsters in the series continues to increase. Here are just a few of the fresh faces that will leap out of tufts of tall grass to greet you! Though, thankfully, these are the only new ones we know about as of this writing (along with Polteageist, back in the Inbox section!). The Pokémon Company has been more reserved with advance reveals this time, which helps preserve the surprises for the games themselves!



YAMPER

Ever seen an electric dog collar? How about an Electric-type dog whose collar can zap enemies in battle?



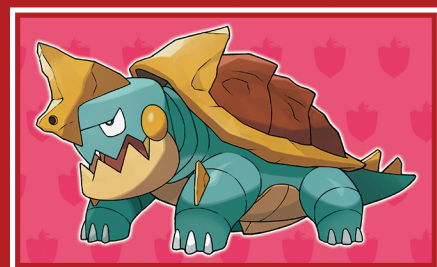
CORVIKNIGHT

Grim. Imposing. The intimidating menace of Galar's skies . . . and also host of the local taxi service?



GOSSIFLEUR

A beautiful bouquet come to life, sweetening the air and the disposition of all who draw near.



DREDNAW

The series' latest take on turtles, and certainly the most terrifying ever! Don't get chomped by this snapper!



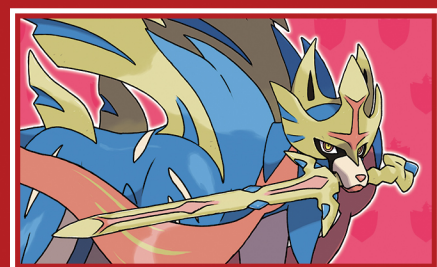
ALCREMIE

Why become a Pokémon Master when you could be the world's greatest pastry chef with Alcremie at your side?



ELDEGOSS

The evolution of Gossifleur, this Pokémon has grown a grand poof of cotton hair. Adorned with seeds, too!



ZACIAN

The headlining Legendary of Pokémon Sword, the valiant Zacian never misplaces its grand blade.



GALARIAN ZIGZAGOON

Originally encountered in the Hoenn region, the playful Zigzagoon has become a Dark/Normal-type in Galar.



GALARIAN LINOONE

Once the final form in the species' two-stage line, Linoone is now just the pit stop on the way toward . . .



OBSTAGOON

. . . the first all-new, region-exclusive evolution! Only Linoones in Galar can evolve further to this new form!



GALARIAN PONYTA

Despite its cotton candy appearance, this new version of Ponyta is not a Fairy-type. It's Psychic instead!



GALARIAN WEEZING

If you want to know what a Galar region Fairy does look like, well, here you go! Poison/Fairy Galarian Weezing.



SIRFETCH'D

Everyone's new favorite bird knight! Farfetch'd in Galar can finally evolve and achieve this noble new form.



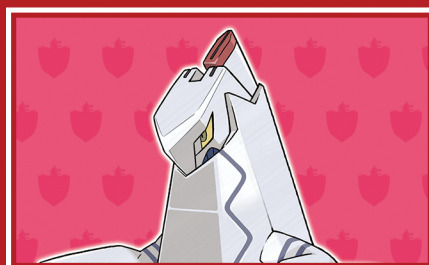
ROLYCOLY

Leaving those old slowpokes Geodude and Roggenrola in the dust is this wheel-equipped new Rock-type!



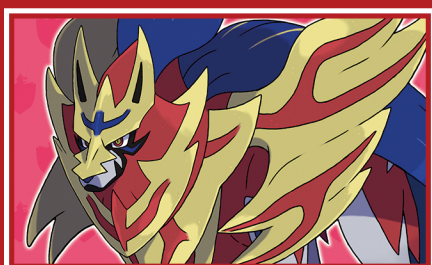
CRAMORANT

Ever get a fish caught in your craw? Cramorant has. Pretty much on a daily basis!



DURALUDON

Wait, who let this enemy from the Mega Man series into the Galar region? A Steel/Dragon powerhouse!



ZAMAZENTA

The headlining Legendary of Pokémon Shield, the steadfast Zamazenta can endure any attack.



IMPIDIMP

Still not *officially* revealed as of this issue's release, but we know Impidimp's the first-ever Dark/Fairy!



MORPEKO

Finally, this cheerful hamster has a hidden dark side – it switches to "Hangry Mode" when its tummy rumbles!



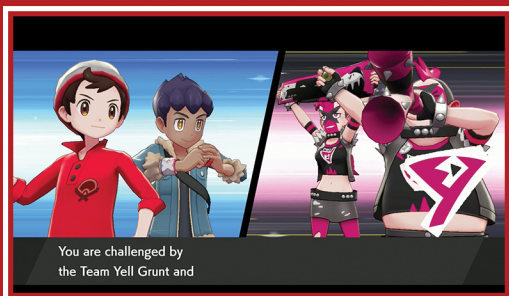
TOXIC FANS

The overbearing annoyance of Team Yell.

DO YOU HAVE a favorite sports team? How far would you go to support them? Cheer them on during their games? Wear their logo? Get in the face of fans of rival teams and scream at them about how *your* team is the best and everyone else is dumb for not seeing that?! Well, it's that most annoying extreme of fandom that's informed the creation of the Pokémon world's newest capital-T Team, Team Yell.

Unlike past Teams who wanted to conquer the world, flood the planet with water or other such global-scale goals, Team Yell seems to just be a local gang of Galar League fans who cheer incessantly and irritatingly in favor of their preferred Trainer, Marnie. Marnie and her Morpeko have just absolutely enamored this bunch of hooligans, and they'll slather on face paint, toot on their vuvuzelas and even challenge you to battles directly in order to defend her honor. (Marnie, meanwhile, seems to tolerate this behavior with indifference.)

Team Yell may be Game Freak's subtle meta commentary on toxic fandom after years of dealing with aggressively outspoken Pokémon fans. (But they're not referencing *you*, right?)



OVERSIZED OPPONENTS

It's you vs. kaiju in Max Raid Battles!

SINCE EVERY PAST main series sequel in the Pokémon franchise played out on small portable screens, one thing Game Freak has always struggled to capture is a real sense of scale. I mean, how are you supposed to know how enormous a Wailord is really meant to be when it has to be displayed in the same small square of pixel real estate that's also used for Caterpies and Weedles? But the shift to the Switch means comparatively massive TV screens are now available to show off all of these mighty monsters, and the developers have cooked up a special supersized showcase to take advantage of that: Max Raid Battles!

As you explore the Wild Area running through the middle of Galar, you'll occasionally come across some odd beacons

on the ground. When you approach them, you'll be whisked away to an extra-dimensional battle arena where a truly humongous enemy Pokémon will appear to oppose you. Try not to get stepped on!

Facing off against a Godzilla-scale foe on your own wouldn't be too fair, so Max Raid Battles let you team up with other Trainers to assemble a squad of four allies total. These friends can be NPCs, or real human players joining up to take on the same battle through Nintendo Switch Online! (You'll have to be subscribed to that service, of course.) If you all manage to deplete the massive 'mon's HP and win the battle, all four players will then have a chance to catch the creature. And Max Raid-caught Pokémon may have Hidden Abilities not found anywhere else!





THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS

Dynamax! Gigantamax!

BUT OF COURSE the Galar region's massive growth spurts aren't restricted to just Pokémon encountered during Max Raid Battles. You'll be able to embiggen your own monsters through the power of Dynamax and Gigantamax!

This is a little confusing, granted, but the gameplay mechanic is divided in two. All Pokémon in the Galar region have the capability to Dynamax, which means that you can choose to have them grow to skyscraping size for a span of three turns. While in that supersized state, the Pokémon will tap into its primary type (Fire, Water, Bug, etc.) and transform the moves in its normal arsenal of the same type into much more powerful attacks, often with added effects. These are called Max Moves, and one example is the Water-type Max Geyser, which inflicts heavy damage but then also causes rain to fall for several turns after it's used.

Gigantamax, meanwhile, is a bit more

complicated. Not every Pokémon species is capable of it — and even then, not every member of a potentially capable species will be able to access it either. (For example, some Meowths will be able to Gigantamax, but not all of them.) It's a giant, sudden size increase to epic proportions like Dynamaxing, and it also lasts for three turns, but Gigantamaxing is accompanied by a total change in body shape for the user. (Very similar to Mega Evolution from Generation VI — it's the same Pokémon, just temporarily transformed into a new form.)

The real kicker with Gigantamaxing? The new forms are all either super cool or hilariously goofy. Meowth embodies the ancient Internet energy of vintage meme Longcat; Pikachu reclaims its old chonky body from the Gen I era. I can't wait to see what other Gigantamax jokes have made the cut too! (Just nothing for Dunsparce, right?)



GENERATION VIII AND THE RAGE OF THE FANS

Finally, the biggest story surrounding Sword & Shield isn't in the games at all!

OK, SO THIS may be a bit confusing due to the layout of the adjacent page being flipped upside down over there on the right, but please consider this page to be the conclusion of both the Sword side's Division in the Ranks feature as well as Bigger Than Ever Before over here on the Shield side of things. Please don't be angry with me! There's already been enough anger going around in the Pokémon fandom this year, and I don't want to put any more fuel on that fire.

We've just reviewed the entire saga from the start. Pokémon began back in the '90s with the tagline "Gotta catch 'em all" — and with the exception of the break between Gens II and III, that's been possible.

Players could complete the entire Pokédex in any given game by working hard to catch every available creature in one title, then linking up with completed quests stored on cartridges from other generations to transfer over remaining monsters not found in the wild in the one they started with. Though the process is time-consuming and convoluted, a full Pokédex has still been achievable as of Gen VII.

The fan rage we've alluded to again and again in this issue centers, I think, not entirely on the fact that obtaining a completed Dex is not going to be an attainable goal in Sword & Shield, but rather the way Game Freak went about revealing that unfortunate fact. On May 29 this year, The Pokémon Company held a special press conference in which a new service called Pokémon Home was revealed. It's a paid cloud service launching early next year that will allow players to transfer Pokémon captured in old games — from last year's Let's Go titles all the way back to Ruby & Sapphire, and even including Pokémon GO — to a personal storage system that ensures their safety and availability forever. The incredibly strong implication of that announcement was that you'd be able to move your old monsters to the new Home service, then further migrate them into Sword & Shield to be able to enjoy the company of your old favorites in the new Galar region.

But not two weeks later, during the Sword & Shield segment of Nintendo's Treehouse Live broadcast at E3, Game Freak's Junichi Masuda apologetically announced that only the Pokémon that officially appear in the Galar region Pokédex will be able to be moved in that manner. The rest —

presumably several hundred of the old 'mons from Gens I through VII, will be left in the past.

It was like pulling the rug out from under millions of people at once! Had the Home announcement not taken place when it did, the blow would not have felt so severe. But people were cheerfully looking forward to this one major aspect of the new HD era of Pokémon, and now it's a no-go.

Now, those Pokémon who don't appear in Sword & Shield won't be gone for good. Future games — maybe even as soon as next year — will bring many, if not all, of them back, and they'll get their moment of HD clarity too. In fact, The Pokémon Company has set itself up for a future game reveal in the style of Super Smash Bros. Ultimate's "Everyone is Here!" trailer: a simple future sequel that is able to advertise "Every 'Mon is Here" will surely be explosively hype now.

But, for now, many fans are angry, confused or disappointed. Fans who were breeding for stats or Shinies haven't known whether to pause their work or not, as they wait until Sword & Shield go on sale to see if their faves made the cut or not. The fandom will ultimately move past this point, and Pokémon will remain the juggernaut it has been for over 20 years. This year, though, has been a rough one. 

